






# THE KANTERON CHRONICLES

by  
J. N. White

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The Kanteron Chronicles

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*This book is dedicated to the long dead Thomas Paine*

*'cause why not?*



## Introduction

### **A.K.A. Feel Free to Skip this Part if You're so Inclined**

Greetings, fellow readers, and a big, big congratulations on your apparent literacy.

For the record, I happen to be one Joey Neal White, and I'll be your esteemed author for the duration of this book. In certain backwater areas of the Internet, I'm perhaps better known by the moniker "Arthbard" (a name, incidentally enough, originally culled from the very story you are presumably about to read, though I ultimately changed the name of the original character, so good luck figuring out who it is). You can call me by whichever name you happen to prefer. I'm not picky in that regard.

Before you get into the story proper, however, I thought I'd offer a few words of introduction.

I started writing *Kanteron* (as I call it for short, you know) sometime around the spring of 2001. At the time, I was in something of an unexpected gap in my college education. My intention had been to transfer myself from one university to another in the spring of 2000, but some technical cock-up meant that wouldn't actually happen until the summer of '01. It was the first full year I had ever spent out of school since starting kindergarten as a kindergartner.

I continued to write, on and off, over the following year of college, but the bulk of the work was done during the rather depressing, disillu-

sioned year or so after leaving school once and for all (sans diploma; you can use your imagination).

Anyway, the point of all of this boring talk is that a good amount of work went into writing this ridiculous tale, with the first draft being finished in March of 2003 and a fair amount of rewriting, editing, and proofreading to follow. So, what you are about to read consists of lovingly hand-crafted humor written largely during a particularly unfunny period of life by a young writer who had previously dreamed primarily of writing more seriously-minded novels.

The original inspiration for this novel, for those interested in such things, lies solely in Douglas Adams' brilliant *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, which I didn't read until my early twenties. My writing up until then hadn't been particularly comedically inclined. Being something of a genre fan, I'd mostly dabbled a bit with science fiction and horror.

I was a fan of comedy, to be sure—I'd already become quite enamored with Monty Python by this point—but it wasn't until I read Adams that the actual potential of comedy in written form hit me. It wasn't just that he put the sensibilities of Python-style comedy into a continuing story—that was part of it—but it was also the way he worked the humor, not just into the events of the story, but into the very way things were described. I was also fond of the way Adams would go off on bizarre tangents—using the literary device of the titular *Hitchhiker's Guide*—that had little to do with the actual story, though many of them became unexpectedly important as the plot progressed.

The writing seemed so exciting and exuberant to me at the time that I was immediately struck with a great desire to write something *just like that*. I didn't actually start the writing for another month or two, however. This was mostly on the grounds that I had no story to write. None, whatsoever. Every time I started trying to put ideas together in my head, I'd ultimately realize that I was getting too close to *Hitchhiker* for my own good. At one point, I even found myself wondering how I could destroy the Earth differently than Adams had. My thoughts were so wrapped up in *Hitchhiker* that even my efforts to keep from ripping it off overtly were still ripping it off pretty overtly.

The first break in the cycle came when I was trying to think how I would possibly get a human off of the Earth and into space with a bunch of aliens. The decision I ultimately came to was, hey, why do I even need humans in it, at all? That freed me up considerably, but I was still stuck with the fact that I had absolutely no clue what to actually write about.



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Finally, I just said screw it. I decided it didn't matter where the story was going to go, I just needed a place to start. So, I started with a sentence: "For five hundred and thirty-seven years in a row, Kanteron 7 has been voted the best planet in the galaxy to live on." I started there, sat down at my old computer (which was already pretty ancient in those days), and started typing. Everything else would just have to grow from there.

So, while the Douglas Adams influence is probably still evident in my writing, the story did actually turn out to be quite different from what he'd written. It also turned out quite differently than what I had initially expected to write about (this is what happens when you start writing with no plan of where to go), but that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Looking back on it, I'm sure my writerly inexperience shows to a certain degree. The plot, at times, plays out almost episodically, for one thing. Also, I didn't exactly spend a lot of time working on character development. There are literally side characters that show up for single scenes that have more backstory than any of the main protagonists. Though, at the time, I actually kind of liked to think of them as characters in a television show. They exist solely for the purpose of the story. They have no life outside of it. They're born as they come into the story, they do what they've got to do, and then they cease to exist when the story is over.

Still, reading this again in May of 2008, seven years from the time I sat down with that one sentence, I have to say ... I'm pretty damned proud of this. And, I'm also pretty damned happy to finally be getting it out there where people might actually have a chance of reading it.

I should point out to the grammar hounds, however, that everything contained in these pages was typed, edited, and ~~proofed proofread proof-read proofread~~ proofread strictly by yours truly. *And*, while I've done my absolute best to get rid of any errors, typos do have pretty good knack for avoiding detection. So, I apologize if your fragile sensibilities are offended by a particularly ill-constructed compound sentence or flagrant disregard for accepted punctuation usage. If anyone out there wants to point out an especially egregious mistake on my part, I'll most likely beg forgiveness and make every effort to repair the error in order that future readers not have to suffer through, say, an instance of the word definite spelled with an "a" instead of an "i."

I'll also use this space to address the fact that this is a science fiction story. It takes place on an alien planet and, as such, contains a number of made-up words used to describe various pieces of alien technology, as

well as flora and fauna—even, in some cases, when the alien objects in question are directly analogous to existing “real” Earth things. Naturally, these pretend words come with a certain amount of description wherever I felt it necessary, but it also occurs to me that not everyone’s brain has the want or desire to hang onto every single bit of phony terminology I might happen to throw at it. For this reason, I’m including a small glossary at the end of the book, à la Frank Herbert’s *Dune*, so that, if you lack the capacity to remember what, say, a “*groblek*” is, you can always turn to the back of the book to remind yourself that it’s really just a stupid dog.

And, finally, before you go on to page one, let me say that this book is being released under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial License. The basic gist of this is that you’re perfectly free to share this work, in whole or in part, with others provided that said sharing is done strictly in a noncommercial way for noncommercial purposes and that you credit the author—that author being me, J. N. White, a.k.a. Arthbard. Also, a link to [www.arthbard.com](http://www.arthbard.com) would be nice. For a more thorough legal description of what this license entails, you may view it in its entirety by opening the Internet web browser of your choice (I recommend Mozilla Firefox, for what it’s worth) and visiting the following URL:

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So, naturally, I encourage everyone to share this book with everyone else. If you’ve purchased this, I appreciate it! Thanks! If you haven’t, but want a hard copy for your own, personal library, you can reopen your web browser and visit <http://www.arthbard.com/kanteron> to find out how to order a copy for yourself. If you *don’t* want a hard copy but find you’ve enjoyed the book and would like to help out the poor, struggling artist that wrote it (that, again, being me), you can reopen your web browser to that very same page (<http://www.arthbard.com/kanteron>), where I’ll be accepting donations, most likely via PayPal.

So, with all of that out of the way, get ready to read *The Kanteron Chronicles*. Sit back, adjust your seat, dim the lights ... and then turn the lights back on, because this is a book, not a movie, and it’s really hard to read in the dark ... But sit back, relax, and get ready for what I hope you will find to be a relatively engrossing and somewhat entertaining read.

I sincerely hope you enjoy reading this book as much as I’ve enjoyed ... well, doing various other things.

You get the idea.







The Kanteron Chronicles  
A Soon-To-Be Classic Tale Of Science Fiction, Intrigue, And—Okay, If  
It'll Get You To Buy It—Pornography

By J. N. White





## **Prologue**

### **What's Going on Here**

For five hundred and thirty-seven years in a row, Kanteron 7 has been voted the best planet in the galaxy to live on. For many years, scientists have been trying to pinpoint the main attraction in a vain attempt to improve the quality of life on such horrifically dismal worlds as Blotskapar 29, which is reputedly so terrible that death is frequently looked forward to as the most pleasant event to take place during a being's lifetime. In fact, rather than mourning the passing of a dear friend, the residents of Blotskapar 29 actually celebrate it due to the fact that, no matter what happens to a person's soul after death, not even Hell could come even remotely close to the horror of life on this forsaken world. Unfortunately, even these celebrations tend to suffer from a noticeable lack of enthusiasm, as those celebrating—rather than feeling happy that a friend has moved on to a better place—generally feel jealous that the corpse in question has managed to escape life on Blotskapar 29 before them. To make matters even worse, instead of moving on to Heaven or Hell, the Blotskaparian dead are usually reincarnated back onto their home world for yet another lifetime of misery.

But, to get back to Kanteron 7—where we were before I so unprofessionally left the subject to discuss an infinitely less interesting topic and then abruptly left that topic only to unprofessionally refer to myself

in the first person—scientists have long struggled to discover the secret behind the incredible bliss that seems to inevitably accompany life on this amazingly wonderful planet. Any discussion on this subject generally involves a detailed analysis of the three predominant theories. I, however, am much too lazy to partake in such an analysis. Likewise, the attention span of the reader is, in all likelihood, much too short for such a discussion to maintain interest. Hence, the best course of action seems to be simply listing the theories:

1. The inhabitants of Kanteron 7 have learned to ignore the myriad distractions of life and, instead, to focus on personal relationships with family and friends, thus overlooking the unpleasant aspects of life in favor of those that are truly important.
2. Kanteron 7 has been blessed with a great abundance of the softest toilet paper in the known universe.
3. For five hundred and thirty-seven years in a row, the ruler of Kanteron 7 has bribed 51% of the people in the galaxy to vote for his planet as the best one to live on.

Unfortunately, though these theories all show a great deal of promise, neither is quite sufficient to fully account for the joy of life in this terrifically wonderful place. Regardless of the reason, however, the end result is the same: Life on this extraordinarily blissful world is always excruciatingly fun, and any story that takes place on this unbelievably entertaining planet is guaranteed to be jaw-droppingly good. Unfortunately, the story you are about to read takes place on Kanteron 6, so all bets are off.



## **Chapter 1**

### **Exposition and Extraneous Information**

It was a perfectly normal day on Kanteron 6. The sun was shining nearly as brightly as on Kanteron 7.<sup>1</sup> The birds were singing almost as beautifully as those in the Kanteron 7 forests, which, come to think of it, are just a little bit greener than those on Kanteron 6. And, of course, the toilet paper came amazingly close to the extraordinary plushness of the universally renowned Kanteron 7 bathroom tissue. Despite all of this, however, a dark cloud hung over Kanteron 6. Well, okay, technically speaking, it wasn't all that dark, really, but, when compared to the brilliantly white clouds seen on Kanteron 7, it seemed that way, and therein lied the problem. No matter how good life was on Kanteron 6, it was never quite as good as on its closest neighbor, Kanteron 7. This led many people to form the opinion that life on their world was actually much worse than it really was. Thus, there was an ever-going struggle to improve the quality of life on the planet, but, since Kanteron 6 already

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<sup>1</sup> Granted that Kanteron 7 is, as its name would insinuate, the seventh planet of its particular solar system—with Kanteron 6, naturally, being the sixth—inquiring readers may have certain questions. If you happen to be of a particular mindset, for example, you may well wonder how in the name of photons the sun might appear to be brighter on the planet farther from it. With that said, this mindset is probably the reason that no one wants to have sex with you, so I suggest you keep all the physics-related plot holes to yourself.

had the second highest standard of living in the galaxy, improvement was rather difficult. That didn't stop people from trying, though.

Ardel Voodavog, for example, felt that Kanteron 6 would be more pleasant if it rained less often. His proposed solution was to create a device that would prevent the formation of rain clouds. After years of tireless work and research, Ardel finally achieved his goal, and his invention, the Voodavog-Sunny-Day-Maker, was presented to the public. It was a huge success. Unfortunately, however, what Ardel had foolishly failed to realize was that people need water to live. After a 50-year drought wiped out 49% of the planet's population, the Voodavog-Sunny-Day-Maker was pulled from the market, and several members of the Voodavog family had their last name changed to Voodalor in order to dissociate themselves from Ardel's disgrace.

Another such improvement attempt was carried out by Erilit Propchi, who formed the opinion that it would be awfully nice if Kanteron 6 were a little bit sunnier. This opinion led him to develop a gas that would thin the atmosphere of the planet in order to better allow the rays of the sun to pass through. The effect of this was twofold. In addition to making breathing extremely difficult, it caused the sun to become so bright that 49% of the planet's population was permanently blinded.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, the most well-documented and widely studied of these improvement attempts is Crumany Crawford's effort to create the universe's softest toilet paper. Crumany's first step was to take over the company responsible for Kanteron 6's entire bathroom tissue distribution. Then, he had all toilet paper replaced with his own Super-Soft-Pleasure-Wipes. What Crumany overlooked is that such softness required a very unstable molecular structure, a fact which caused his Pleasure-Wipes to disintegrate completely before they had even reached store shelves. This gave rise to one of the darkest periods ever in Kanteron 6's recorded history: The Great Shortage of '63, during which 79% of the planet's literature was lost forever.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this 49% of the planet's population just so happened to be the exact same 49% that would later die during the 50-year drought, thus explaining any lack of blind characters you might notice in this story. Of course, many readers will doubtlessly believe this to be highly unlikely. They will argue that the odds against this are so astronomically huge as to make such an event quite an impossibility. However, let me assure you that there is a perfectly logical explanation that will lay all of your doubts to rest. Unfortunately, the paper it was written on was forever lost during The Great Shortage of '63.

<sup>2</sup> See.

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Finally, one man realized that these attempts at improving the quality of life on Kanteron 6 weren't working. He knew that the only reason things seemed so bad on Kanteron 6 was that they seemed so good on Kanteron 7; the only real problem facing the residents of his planet was that of envy. He knew that life was so good on Kanteron 6 that any attempt to change things could only end in disaster. Thus, he developed his own solution.



## **Chapter 2**

### **The Idea**

Enol Vaspounden blinked his eyes sleepily. Having just awakened from his three-month slumber, he found that he was feeling rather hungry. He yawned, revealing a mouthful of jagged teeth, and stretched his powerful legs, scraping his enormous claws against the earthen floor of his cave. Then, Enol began his quest to find sustenance. He purposefully strode out of the cave to a nearby stream, where he spent several hours catching and eating live salmon. Having sufficiently stuffed himself, Enol let out a mighty roar, terrifying every small animal in the vicinity. Enol Vaspounden was, in fact, a bear living on the planet Earth and therefore inconsequential to the story at hand.

Meanwhile, back on Kanteron 6, a being who by some strange coincidence was also named Enol Vaspounden awoke from a three-hour nap, let out an inaudible yawn, and groggily stumbled into the kitchen to fix himself a cup of frompe.<sup>1</sup> Enol Vaspounden was, in fact, not a bear but a comparatively human-like creature known as a Kanteronian.

Kanteronians are the natural inhabitants of Kanteron 6. That is, they share the planet with several other species, but they are the only one that

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<sup>1</sup> Frompe is a wildly popular Kanteronian beverage which is usually drunk in the morning, just after one has awakened. It is served hot, has a foul odor, and tastes terrible. No one is quite sure why it is so popular, but they drink it, anyway.

is widely considered to be intelligent. It can, however, be noted that at one point some grad-school students decided to try to prove that grobleks—a Kanteronian species of creatures similar, in many respects, to an Earth dog—were also intelligent. After eight years of research, funded by \$7,846,324.87 worth of government grants, they released their findings to the public. The public agreed that grobleks were, indeed, very impressive but questioned whether the ability to pretend to be dead on command in an attempt to have a larger creature feed it was really sufficient evidence to qualify a life form as “intelligent.”

Of course, since Enol Vasphounden did not own a pet groblek, there was only very little question that he was the most intelligent life form in this particular apartment. In fact, you might even say that he was the most intelligent life form in the galaxy, but you would probably be wrong.

However, what you could definitely say without any doubt about Enol is that his skin was a sort of palish green. Surprisingly, this had extremely little to do with the exceeding ickiness of the beverage making its way down his unfortunate throat. Rather, palish green skin is a fairly typical trait common to all Kanteronians, no matter what they’ve been drinking.

What you could also say about Enol—in addition to the greenness of his skin and the knowledge, or shortage of it, contained within the depths of his brain—was that he was about make a visit to the home of his good friend Gasper Nandelhuck. Enol quickly swallowed what was left of his frompe, put on his flazer,<sup>1</sup> and left the apartment.

As he exited the building, Enol caught sight of the neighborhood frompe shop. He wasn’t in a big hurry, so he decided this would be a fine time to stop by for a quick cup of frompe. Inside, he studied the menu, which featured 255 different types of frompe that all looked, smelled, and tasted exactly the same. After a few moments, he made his choice. “I’ll have a #58, please.”

Upon receipt of his of his #58, Enol sat down at one of the numerous booths and enjoyed his beverage, despite the signals it informed his tongue to relay to his brain. After emptying the mug of

<sup>1</sup> For those who are unfamiliar with Kanteronian fashion, it should be explained that a flazer is, essentially, a Kanteronian coat with three arms. As Kanteronians, themselves, have only the two arms, the usefulness of this third arm has often been debated. Most people wear them simply because they think they look cool and everyone else wears them, but there are a few people who insist that it’s nice to have the extra arm “just in case.”

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steaming liquid into his mouth, Enol stood up, left, and continued on his way.

When he reached Gasper's street, Enol passed by another frompe shop. At this point he wasn't especially thirsty, but a sign in the window advertised a new, 256th type of frompe. Since this flavor wasn't available in his own neighborhood, Enol decided that it would be incredibly stupid for him to pass up the opportunity to taste this latest drink type. Thus, he went inside and had a mug of this new, exotic frompe, which looked, smelled, and tasted exactly the same as the 255 other flavors already available on his street.

Finally, Enol arrived at Gasper's apartment building, a tall structure painted an appallingly tacky shade of purple. What is appallingly tacky to one culture, however, is the height of fashion to another. It can also be said that what is the height of fashion to one culture will, one day, be appallingly tacky to that same culture. Fads come and go. On Kanteron 6, they came and went about once every three days.

In fact, just a few days before, the apartment building in question had been an appallingly tacky shade of orange. The trick to keeping up with the ever-changing fashions was computerized paint, which could easily change colors with a simple combination of button presses and advanced calculus. Unfortunately, no matter how many square roots and multivariable equations were inputted, the paint only ever seemed to create appallingly tacky shades of colors that were not especially good for buildings. The side-effect was that fashion was forced to switch the definition of "appallingly tacky" with that of "really neat," effectively solving the problem, if only for three days at a time.

Enol stood outside while he introduced his third cup of frompe to the first two that were currently rushing their way through his suddenly overworked digestive system. He tossed the empty cup into a nearby waste receptacle, entered the building, rode the elevator upstairs, knocked on Gasper's door, and promptly asked to use the restroom. Once Enol had completed his expulsion of unnecessary fluids, Gasper politely asked him if would like to have a nice, hot cup of frompe. Not wanting to seem rude, Enol graciously accepted Gasper's hospitality.

After presenting Enol with his drink, Gasper sat down in one of the two appallingly tacky orange chairs (he had been having trouble trying to reprogram the computerized upholstery) and propped his feet up on the frompe table, which was littered with notebooks arranged in precisely the right manner as to suggest that the person who put them there wanted

them to capture visitors' attentions without having them *look* like they were put there to capture visitors' attentions.

Enol started the conversation on sports. "The Crogters are having a pretty good season so far. They could even go on to the finals."

Gasper absentmindedly twirled a finger in one of the black curls hanging down on either side of his otherwise hairless head and unenthusiastically responded, "Hmm ...? Oh, yeah. Crogters. Sure."

Enol tried changing the subject to music. "Have you heard the new Demboyso album, yet? It's excellent. I mean those are some really talented guys."

Gasper shook his head uninterestedly. "No. Haven't heard it, yet." After a moment, he added, "I've been busy." After another moment, he also added, "I've been doing ... other things." He nodded his head ever-so-not-at-all subtly towards the notebook-festooned table.

Enol brought up the cinema. "I hear Kilo Jopset may be coming out with a new movie pretty soon. That should be pretty ..."

Frustrated with his friend's complete unwillingness to take a hint, Gasper suddenly interjected, "Careful, Enol! Don't spill anything on my notebooks."

Enol glanced at his mug, which was not even in the vicinity of the vicinity surrounding the frompe table, and politely responded, "Oh ... Sorry. So ... what's with all the notebooks?"

Gasper brightened up visibly. "Oh, you don't really want to know about all that."

"No, I do. Tell me."

"Well ... No, you wouldn't be interested."

"Okay, fine," said Enol. "I didn't really want to ..."

Before Enol could finish, Gasper removed his feet from the table, sat up, and began to talk excitedly. "You know, this is a pretty nice planet. Life here really isn't bad at all. Yet people don't seem to be happy."

"Okay."

"Right," continued Gasper, picking up one of the many notebooks. "So, lately, I've been asking myself why this is so. Kanteron 6 is a nice place. It has windswept valleys. It has vast, blue oceans. It has the galaxy's highest concentration of frompe shops. So, why are so many people unhappy?"

"You tell me," suggested Enol.

"I was just about to," explained Gasper.

"Oh, sorry."



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“I think the people are missing something. Something that would make their lives complete. Something that they probably don’t even know they need. In all likelihood, it’s not even a big something. That would explain why no one has ever noticed it before. No one has ever taken the time to sit down and ask themselves, ‘Just what is this tiny, little, insignificant thing that no one has,’ but that’s just what I’ve been asking myself, recently. I’ve thought long and hard about this for months now, and I think I’ve finally figured out the answer.”

“Go ahead,” prodded Enol, “tell me.”

Gaspar paused for dramatic effect. Unfortunately, he paused for rather a bit too long, completely destroying the impact of his next word: “Glazers!”

A puzzled expression came over Enol’s face. “What,” he asked, “are glazers?”

An eerily large smile spread its way across the lower portion of Gaspar’s face as he prepared to reveal his brilliant idea to his good friend, Enol. “They’re a bit like flazers, but they have one small difference.”

“Yes?”

“They have,” said Gaspar, opening the notebook to show off his conceptual sketches, “four arms!”

A look of enlightened understanding suddenly failed to reveal itself on Enol’s face. Now, had Gaspar correctly estimated the appropriate length for his last dramatic pause, the idea might have made more sense, and things may have turned out quite a bit differently, but, as it is, a very puzzled Enol asked, “What’s the fourth arm for?”

Having not expected this kind of question, Gaspar was a bit taken aback. After a dramatic pause that was, quite frankly, much too short, he gave the only answer he could think of: “Well ... You know ... Just in case ...”

A persistently unenlightened Enol asked, “Just in case of what?”

Quickly coming to the conclusion that he liked asking questions more than answering them, Gaspar said, “Well, do you think you can come up with something better?”

Enol did, indeed, think that, so he said, “Yes, actually, I do.”

“So, tell me.”

“I was just about to.”

“Oh.”

“I don’t think that four-armed apparel is really the answer we need, here. The only thing that’s wrong with our planet is this inane jealousy

we have towards Kanteron 7. Some people will just never be satisfied so long as there's one planet out there that's better than ours."

"Well," said Gasper, "what do you suggest we do about it?"

"There's only one thing we can do about it," said Enol. Then, after a dramatic pause of such staggeringly perfect length that Gasper's heart skipped three beats and his brain spun around in his head, he continued, "We have to get rid of Kanteron 7."

"Get rid of?"

"We have to," explained Enol, "blow it up."

Now, had Enol's last dramatic pause been a microsecond longer, this idea would doubtlessly have sounded rather silly, and things might have turned out quite a bit differently. As it is, though, everything seemed to make perfect sense, and Gasper could only say, "Wow," and watch as the notebook fell out of his hand to slide off the frompe table, which suddenly seemed very embarrassed to be holding all of these silly drawings of overly-limbed jackets. Once his brain had spun back to its correct position, Gasper asked, "How can we do that?"

"The first step," said Enol, "is to find a weapon capable of destroying an entire planet. The second step, obviously, is to use this weapon on Kanteron 7."

"So, what's stopping you?" asked Gasper.

"Well, it's not as if I can just walk down the street and go into a Weapons Capable of Destroying an Entire Planet 'R' Us."

"Hmm ... Yes ..."

"Weapons of that magnitude are fairly hard to come by."

"The military would have weapons like that," said Gasper.

"And?" asked Enol.

"And," said Gasper, "this is an election year ..."

Enol considered this for a moment, then asked, "Are you suggesting that I run for Supreme Ruler of Kanteron 6?"

A look of surprise came over Gasper's face. "Oh ... Well, I suppose that might work, too."

"Too?"

"Well," said Gasper, "I was going to say that you might be able to break into a heavily-guarded military warehouse on Election Day and leave with a twenty-ton meganucleatomic-deplanetizer."

"Were you?" asked Enol.

"Yes, I was," admitted Gasper. "I think your idea's pretty good, too, though."

## **Chapter 3**

### **A Word on Language**

There are zillions and zillions of stars in the universe. Not all of these stars have planets, but most of them do. In fact, most have several planets. Of these planets, several hundred million of them have intelligent life forms on them. Many of them even have multiple intelligent species. In all, there are eight hundred thirty-seven million two hundred sixty-three thousand nine hundred and one different forms of intelligent life in the universe. Each of these intelligent species has, over countless millennia, had to develop its own civilization with no outside interference from beings on other planets. One of the earliest, most important developments of these civilizations is that of language. Thus, all of the eight hundred thirty-seven million two hundred sixty-three thousand nine hundred and one intelligent species has had to develop its own language with no help from any of the eight hundred thirty-seven million two hundred sixty-three thousand nine hundred other intelligent species in the universe. Given this fact, logic seems to dictate that the possibility of any two species independently developing the exact same language is quite astoundingly tiny. This will likely lead many to the conclusion that the possibility of every intelligent life form in the universe speaking the same language is incredibly silly. This brings us to the very important question of why the Kanteronians in this book speak perfect English—or

at least as perfect as this particular author knows how to write it. The answer to this is quite simple: Every intelligent life form in the universe speaks English.

However, before you toss this book into the wastebasket (or the recycle bin on your computer's desktop if you happen to be reading digitally), thinking to yourself that its writer is obviously a moron, please give me a chance to explain. You see, all intelligent life forms have certain things in common. They all need air to breathe, food to eat, and water to drink. According to one popular theory, they also all have a pattern encoded into their brainwaves which causes the language developed by all species to be English.

The biggest problem with this theory is that, here on Earth, we have several civilizations that speak languages other than English. This forms a bit of a puzzle. If these life forms do not speak English, then how can this theory be accurate? A bit of thought, however, brings us to an obvious conclusion: These non-English-speaking life forms are not intelligent. To prove this is relatively simple. Let us consider babies. Now, can babies find the derivatives of quadratic equations? Can babies make use of L'Hôpital's rule in solving complex integrals? Can babies achieve high Tetris scores? Clearly, babies are unintelligent. Now, can babies speak English? Of course, the answer is no, they can't, don't be silly. This brings us to the conclusion that unintelligent life forms do *not* speak English. From this, we can draw the rather obvious conclusion that all intelligent life forms *do* speak it. Hence, our theory is, essentially, proven.

Non-intelligence, however, is a condition that can be overcome. After all, can babies not *learn* to speak English? When a being learns to speak English, it then becomes intelligent.

Of course, this will not prevent the unintelligent civilizations from attempting to poke holes in our logic. An unintelligent Frenchman, for example, might argue, in his silly French language, that even a parrot can be taught to speak English, except he wouldn't call it a parrot because he doesn't speak English and is, therefore, unintelligent. However, this point, no matter how unintelligent it may be, does pose us with an interesting question. Is a parrot, then, by this logic, an intelligent creature? Well ... It's smarter than a Frenchman, anyway.

So take that, France.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The First Step**

Enol examined his surroundings. They were familiar, yet he was lost. Utterly, completely, and hopelessly lost. He needed a point of reference ... He needed landmarks ... Unfortunately, everything looked exactly the same. The entire building seemed to be composed of identical hallways lined with identical filing cabinets and carpeted with identical rugs that had gone out of style some twenty-three identical years ago. Heck, they weren't even computerized.

This was Enol's first ever visit to The Kanteron 6 Center for Government, Law, and Telling People What to Do. The Center for Government, Law, and Telling People What to Do had a grand reputation. Enol had imagined large rooms with ornately carved statues and majestic fountains spewing streams of sparkling water some twenty unique feet into the air. Instead, there were nothing but halls and filing cabinets.

The third arm of Enol's flazer flapped at his side, swinging annoyingly as he turned a corner into another hallway lined with filing cabinets. He scratched the pointy tip of one of his ears, which, unlike those in some lesser science fiction works, pointed down instead of up.

He thought that there seemed to be an awful lot of filing cabinets. He didn't understand how there could be so much of anything that it would

require this many cabinets to file it in. Perhaps The Center for Government, Law, and Telling People What to Do also doubled as The Kanter-on 6 Center for Filing Cabinet Storage.

Enol had come here to fill out the appropriate forms for declaring himself a candidate in the upcoming Supreme Ruler election. When he had arrived, the task had seemed much less daunting, as just inside the entrance he had seen a door labeled “Political Nominations.” Unfortunately, the Chairman of Political Nominations had informed him that he could not be given the appropriate forms unless he first received authorization from Nominee Approval. Enol asked where he might find this department, but the chairman’s directions had only led him to a door marked “Scraping Dead Rodents off the Road.” That wasn’t it.

Examining the neighboring doors had only revealed such departments as Scraping Dead Birds off the Road, Scraping Dead Fish off the Road, and Scraping Live Rodents off the Road. Enol had then decided that he was, most likely, in the wrong section of the building.

After a couple of hours of hopeless wandering, he had finally located his destination in an identical hallway lined with identical filing cabinets. Unfortunately for him, the Chairwoman for Nominee Approval had informed him that he could not receive authorization without a letter of recommendation from Political Recommendations.

More hours of wandering had led Enol to this department, where the Chaircreature for Political Recommendations refused to give him a letter of recommendation until he had received a campaign badge from Campaign Badge Distribution. The Chair in Campaign Badge Distribution had informed him that he could not be distributed a campaign badge until he had first made a contribution to the campaign pool in Political Nominations.

It was now, as Enol wandered down identical hallway after identical hallway, vainly trying to make his way back to where he had started, that a buzzer sounded, signaling the end of the workday. Soon, identical doors were opening and very nearly identical chairpersons were walking out of identical offices, down identical hallways, past a number of identical filing cabinets, and right by a single Enol Vasphouden, who was entirely unable to get their attention at all, so great was their desire to go home and spend time with their families or, most likely, to go down to the pub and spend time with their favorite reality-numbing beverages.

“Er ... Hello,” interjected Enol. “Hello, could someone help me?”

Either no one could, no one was willing to, or everyone was a mind-

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less drone with but one goal in life: To leave.

“I ... Er ... Could someone direct me to the exit, please.”

No one did. Herds of Chairpersons stampeded by, pushing Enol into various filing cabinets as they made their way to their destinations. The last thought through Enol’s mind before he blacked out was that the dent his head made in one particular filing cabinet might at least make it a little less identical than the rest.



Enol opened his eyes. The hallway was empty. How long had he been out? How was he going to get out of here? Who did he expect to answer either of those questions, seeing as how the hallway was so empty?

He stood up, eyed the dented filing cabinet unhappily, and rubbed a large, sore spot on his cranium. The impact had flattened the hair on the left side of his head, causing that on the right to stick up like a dark green wave in a sea of highlighted roots. He wondered what it looked like. Maybe he could start a new trend. It certainly wouldn’t have been the first time a popular hairstyle had resulted from a serious head injury.

He looked around for a clock. He didn’t know what time it was. Obviously, it must be before six, though, because all of the lights were still on. Six was the time the government had decided was appropriate for their official buildings to turn off the lights to conserve energy, which happened right now.

“Crud ...”

Well, at least he knew what time it was.

Enol awkwardly felt his way down a number of identically dark hallways. After bumping into several walls and stepping on something that he was reasonably sure was not dead, Enol gave up, curled up in a dark corner, and went to sleep.



Enol slowly awoke. He tried to stand up but found it difficult. There appeared to be something very wrong with this particular pitch-black hallway. For one thing, it smelled terrible. For another, it seemed to be unnaturally cramped. Also, it now appeared to be filled with garbage. It took Enol several moments to realize that he was not in a pitch-black hallway, after all, but was, instead, inside of a pitch-black garbage bag. Apparently, the janitor had found him lying on the floor and thrown him

out with the rest of the trash. There was only one way out of the situation. Enol gripped the inside of the garbage bag and ripped open a hole large enough to push himself through.

As he slid through the opening like a newborn baby sliding out of its mother's ... Well, why don't we just go ahead and skip the analogy this time, shall we? Anyway, as Enol slid through the opening, a number of crumpled-up notes, old candy wrappers, and prophylactics spilled out onto the floor around him like so much smelly afterbirth. He made his way to his feet and saw, directly in front of him, the building's entrance. That meant that Political Nominations must be right behind him. Enol turned, but instead of the familiar door, he saw a bespectacled man in a janitor's uniform, which bore a nametag advertising his identity as "Mosley Ertin."

"You pick that up."

Enol leaned over a bit to look behind the janitor and there, indeed, was the door labeled "Political Nominations."

He carefully sidestepped, making his way around Mr. Ertin, who insisted, "Hey! You, pick it up!"

Ignoring the distressed cries of the cleaning staff, Enol made his way towards the door.

"You ... Ooh ... I'm so mad. You ... You'll be sorry."

Six hours later, a very smelly Enol exited the building. He held his official Supreme Ruler Nominee Certificate in his hands, smiled, and went home to take a shower.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Kanteron 6 Politics**

Kanteron 6 government is ruled by some of the most incomprehensibly bizarre politics in the galaxy. The government's founding fathers felt that the best government possible would be one that was run by the people. However, having everyone on the planet vote on every single issue would be quite inefficient. Thus, it was decided to construct a system which would allow the public to vote on the select few people who would make the decisions regarding these issues. Clearly, the people would choose leaders whose beliefs reflected their own. If a leader made unpopular decisions, he could then be voted out of office in the next election, thereby ensuring that he would continue to uphold the people's values even after being elected. It was believed that this system would ensure that the government was, in essence, run by the people.

Unfortunately, the people are morons. The gullibility of the average Kanteronian makes it depressingly easy for a power-hungry lunatic to lie his way into office. To make matters even worse, the average Kanteronian has a very short memory span, meaning that a power-hungry lunatic could easily lie his way back into office a second time since no one ever remembered all of the terrible things he had done during his last term, anyway.

Over the years, these power-hungry lunatics have even managed to

develop a system which ensures that *only* power-hungry lunatics will *ever* be able to win elections. This has become known as the group system. The idea behind this is to lump people with similar ideologies into different groups. Since there are billions of people on Kanteron 6 with hundreds of thousands of completely different belief structures, it was decided that the optimal number of ideological groups would be 2. These two groups are known as the ponies and the hippos. The ponies believe that people should be free and that they must, meanwhile, pass laws which limit freedom. The hippos believe that people's freedom should be limited, even though they object to passing laws which do so. These two groups have been the driving forces of Kanteronian politics for hundreds of years.

In recent times, however, the lines have become blurred as some hippos have come to object to objecting to laws that limit freedom and some ponies have come to the conclusion that laws suck. To complicate matters further, a handful of people have decided that neither of these two groups quite fits in with their own ideologies. Thus, they have decided to form their own groups. One famous Kanteronian politician, for example, became fed up with the hippos' belief that freedom should be limited without passing laws to do so and broke off to form his own group, the koalas, who believe that freedom should be limited without passing laws to do so and that red is also a very nice color. Similarly, another famous politician, tired of the pony belief that people should be free while they pass laws to limit freedom, created his own group, the duck-billed platypi, who firmly believe that everyone else is evil and must be destroyed.<sup>1</sup>

Still, no matter how many groups are created, there will never be enough to account for every existing system of beliefs. Thus, in an attempt to gain more support, members of each group have attempted to satisfy the believers of all ideologies. Unfortunately, in doing so, they have only managed to succeed in alienating everybody.

Strangely enough, most of these alienated people still pick a political group and support it with as much passion as they can possibly muster,

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this story takes place on Kanteron 6, not on Earth. It should also be explained that any similarities between the names of Earth animals and Kanteronian political groups is entirely coincidental and unintentional. In fact, most of these names had no meaning on Kanteron 6 until they were chosen as names for political groups. The one exception to this is the name "pony," which comes from a Kanteronian animal that looks like a pony, acts like a pony, and sounds like a pony, but is, in fact, not a pony.

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even if the group's candidate happens to be a total idiot, as is usually the case.



## **Chapter 6**

### **The Importance of Family**

As Enol entered her apartment, preparing to break the news to her, Quipsar was sitting on her painfully yellow couch (she'd never managed to properly reprogram her upholstery the last time the fashions had changed), watching FV.<sup>1</sup> "Quipsar," he said, "we have to get married."

Quipsar raised one long, blue fingernail to her lips and told him, "Shh ..."

Kanteronian fingernails, of course, are not naturally blue. Painting them blue was just something that Kanteronian women did to impress Kanteronian men, despite the fact that fingernails were not generally the part of the female body that tended to hold most men's attention. Mostly, women did it because all of the other women did it, and they feared that, if they didn't do it, too, these other females might gain some sort of advantage.

The technology of fingernail paint was a bit behind that of building paint. Hence, the fingernails had to be painted manually every time the fads changed. Promising research, however, was being done on computerized fingernail polish that would change colors easily with only a quick recitation of a short 200-300 page novel.

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<sup>1</sup> FV is an abbreviation for the word funavision. A funavision is a Kanteronian device that is similar to an Earth television but more advanced in vague, unexplainable ways.

After returning her finger, not to mention her hand and forearm, back to her side, Quipsar added, "I'm watching FV."

"This is kind of important," insisted Enol. "I really think we should talk about it."

"But 'Buds' is on," explained Quipsar. "Can't it wait till the commercials?"

Suddenly, Enol felt extraordinarily stupid. How could he have forgotten that "Buds" was on, tonight? Here he was, thinking about unimportant things like marriage and politics, when he could be watching the funniest, most popular FV show on the planet. Enol immediately put aside all thoughts concerning matrimony and sat down on the couch beside Quipsar to enjoy his favorite show.

Tonight's episode was a good one, too. Like most "Buds" episodes, this one began with the main characters sitting around an apartment and talking in the middle of the day while most people are at work. Charel asked the question, "So what did everybody do last night?"

Lewanoka answered, "I had sex," and the word "laugh" appeared at the bottom of the screen.<sup>1</sup>

Sorr said, "I had sex, too," and the word "laugh" reappeared on-screen.

Then, Shinder said, "I farted," and the word "laugh" returned.

This was followed by the big punchline, where Blodie said, "I farted while having sex!" and the words "laugh loudly and applaud" appeared.

By the time the commercials started, Enol was so entertained that he had forgotten why he had come here in the first place. Quipsar was so entertained that she had forgotten that Enol existed.

Most of the rest of the show featured the main characters sitting around and talking in a frompe shop in the middle of the day while most people are at work. I won't waste space, here, going into detail, but I will mention some of the show's more memorable quotes: Reebi's "I like sex," Lewanoka's "Yeah, sex is fun," and Blodie's "I farted while having

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<sup>1</sup> Kanteronians are, to put it nicely, dense. In addition, they also have an intensely irrational fear of not fitting in. Thus, they are absolutely terrified of the possibility of laughing at something that no one else thinks is funny or crying about something that no one else finds sad. Because of this, most Kanteronian FV shows have started printing instructions at the bottom of the screen telling the self-conscious viewers exactly how they are supposed to react to any given situation. This practice has led to higher ratings for the shows that use it and a greater sense of self-confidence among those who watch them.

sex, again!”<sup>1</sup>

Finally, when the show was over, Quipsar remembered that Enol existed, and Enol remembered that he had to ask Quipsar to marry him.

She turned to look at him and began, “What was ...” Then, she stopped for a moment and, instead, said, “Nice hair.”

“Thanks. I hit my head.”

Quipsar nodded. “I thought so. But, anyway, what was it you wanted to ask me?”

Enol took a deep breath, gathered up his courage, and solemnly began. “Quipsar,” he said, “there comes a time in every man’s life ... Well ... I mean, not in *every* man’s life ... It didn’t come in my Uncle Zombar’s life, but, then, we always suspected that he was a bit of fruit, but, in lots of guys’ lives, there comes this point where they say to themselves ... Well, no ... Not to themselves but to the woman they like ... They say to her, ‘Quipsar ... We have to get married.’”

A puzzled look surfaced on Quipsar’s face. “There’s a time in every man’s life when he wants to marry me?”

“Well ... No,” said Enol. “That’s just in my life.”

“I’m confused.”

“Well ... Okay,” said Enol. “Let me put this another way. Quipsar ...”

“Yes?”

“Quipsar, we have to get married.”

An intensely emotional look came over Quipsar’s face. “Married?” she said. “Married!? Enol, we’ve been going out for a week!”

“Yes,” he said, “I know, but ...”

“Honestly! We’ve only been on two dates!”

“Well, yes, I see, but ...”

“They weren’t even particularly good dates!” pointed out Quipsar.

“Well,” said Enol, “maybe, but ...”

“On the first one,” she continued, “you threw up all over me!”

“Yes, I know ... I’m sorry, but ...”

“And, on the second one, I faked a period just so you would leave me alone!”

“Yes, I know, but ... You did? Never mind. That’s not important, but ...”

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<sup>1</sup> This last line was so funny that it was accompanied by the rarely seen “laugh very, very loudly while rolling on the floor and kicking your legs because what you saw was just so darned funny.”

“Seriously, what on Kanteron 6 ever possessed you to ask me to marry you?”

“Well, you see,” explained Enol, “it’s just that I was running for Supreme Ruler, and ...”

“Supreme Ruler!” shouted Quipsar. “And when were you going to tell me about this?”

“Well ... I ... thought I just did ...”

Quipsar paused for a moment. “Oh ... Well ... I suppose you did ...”

Enol took this moment to explain himself. “You see, I’ve got this really great idea of how I can make everybody’s life on Kanteron 6 a whole lot happier and funner,<sup>1</sup> but, in order to do it, I have to be elected Supreme Ruler, and, statistically speaking, I have a much better chance of doing that if I’m married to a beautiful woman.”

Quipsar was speechless, which isn’t surprising considering that she needed a few seconds to properly piece this sentence together in a way that would make sense to her.<sup>2</sup> When she did speak again, she said, “You think I’m beautiful?”

“Er ...” Enol considered the question. “Yes,” he answered.

“Oh, Enol,” said Quipsar. “That’s so sweet ...”



Every intelligent civilization in the universe has created some kind of institution of marriage. It just seems logical that members of the two different sexes<sup>3</sup> might like to pair up for life. The institution of marriage is always firmly grounded in the religious beliefs, reproductive eccentricities, and/or emotional quirks of the civilization that created it. What sets marriage on Kanteron 6 apart from marriage on other planets is the fact that, for some unknown reason, many Kanteronians have come to the conclusion that marriage would work better as a legal institution. Thus, Kanteronian marriages are being increasingly performed by government officials rather than religious ones, and, instead of being joined together in the eyes of God—or some other, similar deity—people are now being

<sup>1</sup> Yes, I am well aware of the fact that this is generally considered to be poor grammar, but, before anyone tells me that funner isn’t a word, just let me say this: It is on Kanteron 6, so all of my old English teachers can just bite me.

<sup>2</sup> Due, at least in part, to the fact that, contrary to popular belief, funner is most definitely *not* a word.

<sup>3</sup> Or three, in the case of the Humbalarians; or, in the case of the Magitokians, just the one sex.



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joined together in the eyes of Louie Splazeunver, Chairman of The Kanteron 6 Governmental Department of Love.



The Kanteron 6 Institute of Love and Marriage was cold. It was stuffy. It was impersonal. And, it had a big sign advertising, “10% off all marriages performed before noon.”

Standing in line, Enol checked his watch. “Crud. Maybe we can come back and get married, tomorrow.”

Quipsar looked at him disappointedly. “You mean ... not get married, today?”

“Well, it’s cheaper in the morning, so, I mean, why not wait?”

“Because,” insisted Quipsar, “I love you, *now*.”

“But,” he reasoned, “won’t you love me, tomorrow?”

She thought about it. “Maybe.”

After considering this reply for a moment, Enol said, “Yeah, okay. Now’s good.”

The line moved forward a bit, bringing them one foot closer to the clerk behind the counter. They waited. The line moved forward another step. They waited some more.

Then, a female clerk took her place at another position behind the counter and said, “I can marry someone over here.”

Enol hastily pushed an elderly couple out the way in his rush to be first in the newly forming line. Upon reaching the counter, he looked at the clerk, grinned at her in manner Kanteronians typically referred to as “poo-eating,” and said, “Hi.”

“You know,” she clarified, “when I said, ‘marry someone,’ that someone didn’t include me. I assume there’s a female to be involved?”

“Huh? Oh.”

Enol turned around and saw Quipsar helping an elderly couple off of the carpet. He turned back to the woman and said, “Yes, of course. She should be here momentarily.”

A moment later, Quipsar stepped up to the counter. “Did you see that, honey? Those old people fell down.”

“Hmm ... Oh, yes. The floor’s a bit slick, I think.”

“But the floor’s carpeted.”

“Yes,” agreed Enol. “Very slick. Someone should probably tell the cleaning staff.”

Quipsar decided to forget it. She wasn’t about to let the most special

day of her life be ruined by something as silly as her choice of husbands. Instead, she turned to the clerk and said, "We'd like to get married."

"Yes, of course," said the clerk. "And what are your names?"

"Enol Vasphouden."

The clerk scribbled onto a piece of paper.

"Quipsar Jannyorquen."

The clerk scribbled something else onto the paper.

Meanwhile, Enol looked at his fiancé and asked, "Your last name's Jannyorquen?"

She nodded. "It is for now. Why? Is there a problem?"

Enol's mind quickly ran through a list of relatives, trying to see if the name Jannyorquen rang any bells. After a moment, he replied, "No, I think everything's okay."

Much as she hated to interrupt this tender moment, the clerk asked, "Will this be a standard marriage or the deluxe marriage?"

Enol turned back to her and asked, "What's the difference?"

She explained, "Well, the standard package is your basic, no-frills marriage."

"And the other?"

"With the deluxe marriage," the clerk said, motioning towards a piece of ceremonial-looking headgear, "I put on the funny hat and we take a picture of the happy couple that you can show off to your friends and family. For an extra three dollars, we can even draw a little heart on the picture as a symbol of your love for each other."

"Hmm ..."

"Oh, that sounds nice," said Quipsar, smiling cheerily.

"Also," added the clerk, "the deluxe marriage comes with an extended warranty. If you don't like it, you can come back within thirty days and have it annulled."

"We'll take that one," said Enol. Then, after a look from his soon-to-be betrothed, he quickly added, "Nothing's too good for my wife."

The clerk solemnly placed the pointy hat on her head and turned to Quipsar. "Do you want to marry Enol Vasphouden?"

"Yep."

Then, she turned to Enol. "Do you want to marry Quipsar Jannyorquen?"

"Uh-huh."

"Good. Now, by the power vested in me by Louie Splazeunver, almighty Chairman of The Kanteron 6 Governmental Department of

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Love—and not God or some other religious manifestation—I hereby declare you two to be legally married. That’ll be \$23.50.”

As the newlyweds walked out of the building, Quipsar said, “Now, all we need is a kid.”

“A kid?”

“Yeah. People love kids. Especially when they don’t have to take care of them. You’d get lots more votes if we got a kid.”

“Well ... Maybe,” said Enol, “but the election’s eight months away. We don’t have time to have a baby.”

Quipsar shook her head. “No, not a baby. A kid. We could adopt one.”

Enol said, “No, that takes too long. There’s red tape and paperwork and waiting lists ... We’d never get it in time ... Unless ... Quipsar, your parents don’t happen to be rich and famous, do they?”

“No,” she said, “but I’ve got the whole thing worked out, already. See, my neighbor has this kid he doesn’t particularly like. I’m sure he’d let us have it.”



Kanteronian adults have not yet grasped the idea that Kanteronian children are Kanteronians, too. There are millions of Kanteronians who want sex but not babies. This is ridiculously easy to achieve considering that there are a number of products on the market which will allow members of the two sexes to copulate and not impregnate. Still, there is an unexplainably large number of Kanteronians who have babies but don’t want them. The suggested remedy to this problem is to have the baby sucked out of the mother’s body before birth. What happens to the baby before, during, and after this procedure, no one really wants to talk about. Those who do choose to think about it have generally come to believe that it is a bad thing, but there are countless others who consistently tell them that what a woman does with her body is her own choice. Apparently, what a woman does with any body that happens to be inside her body is also her choice and not the choice of the body that will be most affected by said choice. If men considered this logic, occurrences of the problem in question would undoubtedly drop drastically.

Meanwhile, while people who can have babies but don’t want them are having them sucked out of their bodies, there are countless others who want babies but can’t have them, who spend years on waiting lists, hoping for the off chance that one might become available.

The number available, incidentally, is actually quite larger than most people would assume. Agencies handling these sorts of things, however, make people wait, anyway, just to see how serious they really are about wanting one.

By the time the baby is finally presented to its adopters, it is usually more accurately referred to as a child. Also, at this stage in life, the child in question has usually learned anything its would-be parents might have taught it from other children on the playground, instead. There is ongoing debate as to who actually could have taught the information most accurately.



Hiblie Festmartin lived in apartment #3E6H, which was generally dirty, dingy, and had furniture that was not appallingly tacky as he had never bothered to buy the newer kind. Instead of computer chips, his furniture had so many stains that they had actually started to form eye-pleasing patterns on the upholstery.

Hiblie was one of those Kanteronians who wanted sex but not babies. Since his last sexual encounter had given him a baby, in addition to some strange fungus that wouldn't seem to go away, he had decided to play it safe by watching videos of other people having sex but not babies.

He was, as a matter of fact, watching—and rather enjoying—one of these videos when he heard the knock at the door. That was strange. No one ever knocked on his door. It had been so long since Hiblie had last had visitors that he wasn't exactly sure how to handle the situation. The first step was to stand up. Hiblie knew this. The next step, he wasn't so sure of. Should he turn the video player off? He couldn't remember. Did people like to walk in while other people were watching videos of still other people having sex? He thought about it. After a few moments, he decided that, if he liked the videos so much, then whoever was at the door would probably also like them. That settled that, then.

So, Hiblie stood up, left the video player on, walked across the crunchingly dirty carpet—at least he thought it was carpet; it was kind of hard to tell by now—and opened the door. Standing in the hallway was a woman with her hair rolled into a bun above her forehead and a guy with one of those silly three-armed thingies that were so popular recently. Young people today had such stupid fashions and listened to such horrendous music. Almost, he recalled, like young people back in his day.

“Who's there?” Dammit, Hiblie chided himself, that was supposed to

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come *before* he opened the door. He wondered whether he should close it and start over again.

Before he could act, though, the woman said, “Hi, Mr. Festmartin, I’m Quipsar—I live right down the hall—and this is my husband, Enol.”

Hiblie had seen FV shows where neighbors sometimes came over to borrow things. He decided to politely ask them what they needed to borrow. “Waddaya want?” He hoped that sounded as nice as he had intended it.

“Well, Mr. Festmartin,” replied Quipsar, “we came to ask you about your son.”

Son? Oh, the thing that had come out of the woman he’d had sex with. It was in the apartment somewhere, but Hiblie was unsure of its exact location. He wondered whether it should see him watching videos of other people having sex. Well, it probably didn’t really matter. Hiblie’s own father had often watched such videos in front of him, and he’d grown up to be a nice, psychologically-balanced, socially well-adjusted person, after all. “Hold on a minute.”

It was kind of hard to hear the video while he was talking to these people, so Hiblie turned the volume up. Then, he started to look for the ... What did she call it? Son? He looked under the couch. No, it wasn’t under there. He looked behind the FV. Not there, either. It also wasn’t in the oven or the refrigerator.

There was a beer in the refrigerator, though, which was even better. He picked that up, looked at the label, and wondered whether things were usually supposed to be okay to ingest within a year or just a week after the expiration date. There was, as they say, only one way to find out. He looked under the counter to get the bottle opener and happened to find the son sitting there, taking little bits of tape and sticking them all over itself. The bottle opener was just to its left. That was a pretty nice stroke of luck; two birds with one bird-killing thing and all.

He took the son by the hand and led it—and the beer—to the door, where he said, “Here it is. What about it?”

Hiblie drank a sip of beer and listened to Quipsar’s reply through a haze of flashing elephants. The fact that he did not even know what an elephant looked like was not nearly so strange as the fact that they were flashing, flying around his apartment, and, in general, being very odd.

He rubbed his eyes and shook his head. He couldn’t be positive, but he thought that Quipsar—or maybe the elephants—had said something to the extent of being in a bit of a bind and wondering if maybe they

J. N. White

might be granted ownership of the son, who appeared to be currently breaking the laws of nature by being simultaneously both over ten feet tall and well under an inch.

This request was fairly reasonable, he thought. After all, trumpeted the elephants between momentary lapses of nonexistence, what are neighbors for?

## Chapter 7

### Training

Back at his apartment, Enol discovered that the kid didn't talk much.

"Hey, kid, what's your name?"

"..."

"How old are you?"

"..."

"When's your birthday?"

"..."

"How many fingers am I holding up?"

"..."

No, the kid didn't talk much at all.

Suddenly, Enol was struck with a brainstorm. He held his right hand out to the boy and ripped off the piece of tape that it had placed over its mouth.

After a moment of silence, the boy's cries of pain—which, technically speaking, were much more accurately referred to as whispers—totally failed to reverberate throughout the apartment in any way whatsoever.

"Ouch."

"Alright, kid," interrogated Enol, "what's your name?"

"Dernkid."

"Okay, Dernkid, how old are you?"

Interaction with other people ... Dernkid wasn't used to this. He'd spent most of his life sitting under the kitchen counter, taking little bits of tape and sticking them all over his body, which is really much more exciting than it sounds ... Well, actually, no ... It's not more exciting than it sounds. It's really quite boring, but at least it passes the time ... Well, it doesn't actually pass the time, so to speak ... The time passes all by itself. The tape-sticking was just something to do while time passed itself by. Sure, there were many other things to do while time passed itself by, many of which were actually pretty exciting, but sticking little bits of tape to your body had one thing they didn't: Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Dernkid could think of absolutely, positively no reason to participate in this activity. Had this guy asked him a question? Well, it probably wasn't important, so Dernkid politely excused himself to go sit under the kitchen counter and stick little bits of tape all over his body.

Hmm ... Enol scratched the portion of his scalp residing underneath the flattened half of his hair. This parenting thing wasn't going to be easy. If he wanted to win the election, he was going to have to teach this kid to be cute. He would have to find some way of connecting with the boy.

He thought back to his own childhood, attempting to recall what sorts of things his father had done to connect with him. One of his dad's favorite family pastimes had been birthday-forgetting. Another was school-recital-missing. Then, of course, there was the time-honored tradition of leaving your wife and kid for another woman. Upon further thought, Enol decided that he had never really been that cute of a kid and that, therefore, all of his father's activities should be avoided.

"Quipsar, when you were little, how did your father connect with you?"

Quipsar smiled as fond memories began to rush back into her head. "Well, when I was little, he taught me how to work the FV. After that, there were all the times I watched 'Pelican Island,'<sup>1</sup> and he wasn't there. Then, there were all the times when I watched 'Daddy Knows What to Do,'<sup>2</sup> and he wasn't there." She sighed nostalgically. "To this day, whenever I turn on my FV, it's almost like he's not there all over again."

Enol thought about this for a moment, then said, "'Daddy Knows What to Do' ... Now there was a father who knew how to connect with his kids. How did he do it?"

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<sup>1</sup> "Pelican Island" is an old Kanteronian FV show about a bunch of people on an island who can make a satellite out of a tree but can't fix a leaky boat.

<sup>2</sup> Another old FV show. This one was about a perfect man who knew everything.



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Quipsar's memory turned back to the FV shows of her youth, and she answered, "Well, this one time, little Mibby accidentally hit a faseball<sup>1</sup> through the window and lied about it, so Daddy had a talk with him about how lying was bad and he shouldn't do it."

"Great!" said Enol excitedly. "That's just the kind of stuff we need! I'll have to get Dernkid a faseball and a faseball bat, so he can break out a window and lie about it. What else? What else did Daddy do?"

Quipsar began to search her brain for more examples of Daddy's wisdom. "Oh," she said, "one time, little Mibby accidentally got trapped in the old, abandoned mine, and the loyal family groblek had to save him."

Enol considered this for a moment. Something about it didn't seem quite right. "Wait a minute ... That wasn't on 'Daddy Knows What to Do.' That was on 'Lakki.'"

Quipsar paused for a moment. "Oh, yeah ... Man, 'Lakki' was a great show, though. Remember when little Mibby got trapped in that old, abandoned well?"

"Yeah," recalled Enol, "and remember when there was that murder downtown, and Lakki's supervisor got mad at him for not doing things by the book?"

"What?" asked Quipsar in confusion. "No ... That wasn't on 'Lakki.' That was on 'Slomac,' the gritty police drama."

"Oh, yeah! Wow, I used to love that show!"

"That show sucked."

There was a moment of uncomfortable silence before Enol replied, "You have no taste."



"Hey, kid."

Tear tape from roll ... Stick tape to arm.

"Dernkid."

Tear tape from roll ... Stick tape to forehead.

"Hey, you listening to me?"

Tear tape from roll ... Stick tape to ... Oh dear ... It appeared that there was no more room on Dernkid's body left for tape-sticking. What now? This was quite a dilemma.

"I'll give you a cookie if you pay attention."

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<sup>1</sup> A faseball is like a baseball, but calling it a faseball makes it seem somehow alien and, thus, helps to improve the sci-fi atmosphere of the story.

Dernkid searched the farthest reaches of his brain. He was seven Kanteronian years old,<sup>1</sup> and he'd been sticking little pieces of tape to his body for his entire lifetime. Surely, somewhere in that span of time, he must have run out of places to stick tape to.

"Hey, can you hear me?"

This was quite puzzling. No matter how much Dernkid racked his brain, he could find no memory of ever having run out of tape-sticking room.

"Hey, are you alive?"

Dernkid could only assume, therefore, that covering one's entire body in tape was something that was extremely difficult and took many years to achieve.

"Don't make me kick your ass."

It looked as if Dernkid had achieved the ultimate tape-sticking goal. He was, quite possibly, the single greatest tape-sticker in history. He had accomplished the impossible that few dare to even dream.

"Man, I just don't get kids at all."

Dernkid was the master. He had challenged the tape and won. Through his single-mindedly stubborn perseverance, he had, after seven long years, beaten the tape. This was a time of celebration. "Yay." Of course, now that he had demonstrated his superiority over adhesive strips the world over, further tape-sticking seemed silly. There was nothing left here for him to accomplish. Dernkid needed something else. He required some new challenge to occupy his time.

"Hey, did you say something?"

The more Dernkid thought about it, the more it seemed obvious. There was only one thing for him to do, now. Instead of sticking little bits of tape onto his body, he would pull little pieces of tape off of his body. This was his goal. He would not rest until his body was bare and devoid of all adhesive devices. Thirty seconds later, he had accomplished this task. Dernkid, like the reader, wondered how removing the tape could be so easy when putting it on had been so difficult.

"I think this one might be broken ..."

Dernkid looked up. Sound waves were emanating from the male's oral cavity.

"Hey, he's looking at me! I think he understands!"

"Well, if he understands, then you probably shouldn't talk about him like he isn't there."

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<sup>1</sup> Which, just to avoid confusion, are exactly the same as Earth years.

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“Oh, right. I should have thought of that. You’d think I must be almost as stupid as he is.”

The female was releasing sound vibrations, as well. That made for two points of aural stimulation. It was almost like Dernkid’s own, private stereo.

The male held out something in its hands, and, as its lips began to move up and down, the resulting air molecule vibrations formed the words, “Dernkid, it’s Enol ... I mean Dad. Look, I got you a present. It’s your very own faseball and bat. Pretty neat, huh?”

Dernkid closely examined the spherical object and piece of wood that were presented to him.

“Now, your new Mommy and I are going to walk outside for a little bit, and, while we’re gone, I want you to be very careful to not break any windows at all.” At this, the male’s lips twisted up in peculiar manner, and he looked at the female most curiously. Then, they were gone, leaving Dernkid alone with his brand, new ... whatever it was ...



Enol and Quipsar waited outside the apartment door, patiently waiting for the sound of breaking glass.

A minute passed. Then, two minutes passed. These two minutes were quickly followed by 278 more.

Enol said, “Maybe I should go check on him ...”

Before he could act, though, the musical tinkling of shattered glass came from within the apartment.

A smile spread across Enol’s face. “Great!” He excitedly swung open the door and walked into the apartment.

Dernkid was standing by the room’s only piece of furniture, a purple chair (buying only one chair had left Enol with enough money to pay a professional to reprogram its upholstery), holding the faseball bat by his side. On the far side of the room was a shattered window.

Enol delightedly feigned surprise. “Oh my! Dernkid, what happened in here?”

“A window broke.”

“Oh, really?” Enol tried hard not to smile. “It just broke, did it? It broke all by itself?”

Dernkid shook his head.

“Well, then,” said Enol, “what happened?”

“Someone broke it.”

Great! This was going perfectly! Now came the part where Dernkid would blame the shattered glass on a passing stranger. "And do you know who broke it?"

Dernkid nodded.

"Okay, then, who was it?"

Dernkid blinked. "Me."

Enol had already begun his speech before he even realized that things had not gone exactly as they had been planned. "Now, Dernkid, I want to talk to you about lie ... What?"

"I broke it," explained Dernkid.

Enol froze. Honesty. He hadn't counted on this. "Er ... You're sure it was you?"

Dernkid nodded.

"You mean, it wasn't a bank robber ... Or ... Or maybe an evil clown?"

"No."

"Oh ... Well ... Er ... Um ... I ... That is ... Um ... Just ... Don't let it happen, again." With that, Enol rushed back to the hallway and slammed the door behind himself.

After a moment of waiting for a report on the situation, Quipsar prodded, "Well?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

"You mean it didn't work?"

Enol refused to admit defeat. "Heck, even on 'Daddy Knows What to Do,' I'll bet they had to film that scene three or four times before they got it right. Besides, he's still got the bat. There's a chance he might break another window and lie about it."

As if on cue, the sound of breaking glass once again emanated from the other side of the door.

"See," said Enol. "What did I tell you?"

With that, he re-entered the apartment. Dernkid was standing across the room from a second shattered window.

Enol once again feigned surprise and asked, "Dernkid, what happened? Who broke that window?"

"An eight-foot-tall man with a top hat, two eye patches, a hook, and a four-armed flazer climbed up the fire escape and broke out that window."

Perfect! Enol adopted his best fatherly tone of voice and began to lecture, "Now, Dernkid, I want to talk to you about lying. You see, some-

times ...”

“There he is!”

Dernkid pointed to the window, where an eight-foot-tall man with a top hat, two eye patches, a hook, and a four-armed flazer looked in from the fire escape and said, “Eh, sorry ... That were my bad.”

Enol’s jaw dropped. He rushed out of the apartment in frustration.

Quipsar asked, “Well?”

“We’ve still got a few more windows left, Quipsar. And he’s got the bat. I’m going to give that little ... I’m going to be generous and give him another chance to lie to me, then ...” Enol stopped. Suddenly, something odd about the previous events struck him. “Wait a minute ... Four-armed flazer?”



## **Chapter 8**

### **Marketing**

There was a sign on the door. It read, “Complete Your Life: Buy a Glazer.” Enol knocked.

After a few moments, the door was opened, and Gasper greeted him, “Hey, Enol. Nice hair. Hit your head?” Then, noticing his friend’s more interestingly curved companion, he added, “Who’s the hottie?”

“The hottie,” answered Enol, “is my wife, Quipsar.”

“Oh.” That was funny. Gasper hadn’t even known that Enol had a wife. Then again, he’d never really asked. Of course, if he had a wife as hot as Quipsar, he probably wouldn’t want to introduce her to his friends, either. “Where are my manners?” he asked. “Would the two of you like to come inside and have a nice, hot cup of frompe?”

Enol and Quipsar, who had already stopped at the local frompe shop on their way to Gasper’s apartment, naturally accepted this offer. As they entered, Gasper wandered off to the kitchen to fetch their drinks.

When he came back, Quipsar took the cup that was offered to her and said, “So, my husband tells me you have something to do with these four-armed flazers.”

“Glazers,” corrected Gasper, sitting down.

“Excuse me?”

“They’re called glazers, and, yes, I invented them.”

"But why?" asked Enol, sitting in the other chair.

"For the same reason that anyone invents anything," answered Gasper.

"You mean," asked Enol, "for the betterment of humanity?"

"No, don't be silly," said Gasper. "For the cash. The beautiful, green paper units of legal currency."

Dismayed by the absence of a third seat, Quipsar leaned against the wall, attempting to look as uncomfortable as possible in the hopes that one of the men would be sympathetic and offer her a chair.

"What about the sign on the door?" she asked, shifting her weight. "Will a glazer really complete my life?"

"Of course not. That's just marketing," admitted Gasper. Then, he politely added, "You don't have to stand there, you know."

"Oh, thank you," she said, smiling and taking a step forward.

"You can sit on the floor if you want to."

"Oh ..." After a moment's hesitation, she grudgingly lowered herself onto the floor, thinking to herself that chivalry, if not actually dead, had probably just been a myth in the first place.

Enol asked Gasper, "Did you say marketing?"

"Yeah, marketing. The trick is to tell people what they want to hear. In this case, they want to hear that a piece of fabric can finally make them happy."

Quipsar cheered up a bit. "Oh, so it will make me happy, will it?"

Enol was intrigued, a fact he conveyed by saying, "Hmm ... I'm intrigued. Does it really work?"

"Sure," replied Gasper, taking a sip from his frompe mug. "I only put up the signs this morning, and I've already sold 837 glazers."

"And the 837 people who've bought them?" asked Quipsar. "They've finally found happiness, right?"

Enol asked, "Do you think this could be applied to other areas?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean like, say, political candidates."

"Oh," said Gasper, "Sure. I suppose so. I mean, we'd probably have to get rid of the 'one size fits all' line, but, other than that, I think it's pretty much the same."

"Is it really that easy?"

"Yeah, apparently," answered Gasper. "People want to believe you. They want to believe that a flazer with an extra arm is going to solve all of their problems."



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Quipsar enthusiastically interjected, “It will solve my problems, then? Even the one with my ... I mean ... Nothing ...”

“Gasper,” said Enol, “how would you like to help me win the election?”

He nodded. “Sure, sounds like fun.”

“You really think you can do it?”

“Why not?” said Gasper. “I mean, if I can convince people to throw away their hard-earned money on a stupid, ridiculous, ugly, pointless glazer, it shouldn’t be too hard to get them to vote for a nice, respectable guy like you.”

“Excellent,” said Enol.

“I must have one,” said Quipsar.



## Chapter 9

### Enol and Quipsar Walk Home

Enol and Quipsar left the building and stopped by the local frompe shop for a quick drink.<sup>1</sup>

As they left, Quipsar admired her new glazer. She couldn't be entirely sure, but, now that she had it, she thought she might, indeed, be starting to feel a little bit more complete, already.<sup>2</sup>

Enol thought about his impending political campaign. Things seemed to be getting off to a good start. He felt that, now that he had Gasper's marketing savvy on his side, he was sure to win.<sup>3</sup>

Quipsar began to worry. She wondered if one glazer was really enough. She thought that, while she did feel complete, she might not be as complete as she possibly could be. The next time she saw Gasper, she would have to get another glazer, just to ensure that she was at her completest.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to use this moment to apologize to the reader for his gratuitous overuse of footnotes in the preceding chapters.

<sup>2</sup> No, really. The author, himself, is a reader and knows how an overabundance of footnotes can disrupt the natural rhythm of an otherwise excellent story.

<sup>3</sup> Not that this story is excellent, I mean ... I was just speaking in general ... Not that it's bad, either, but the author would prefer to remain modest about his inarguably amazing skills.

<sup>4</sup> Most complete. The author would also like to use this as an ... continued on page 48

As they continued on their way home, Enol didn't say anything.<sup>1</sup>

In reply, Quipsar said absolutely nothing.<sup>2</sup>

Enol continued the conversation with a full minute of silence.<sup>3</sup>

Quipsar wondered if she could really wait until she saw Gasper, again. Maybe it would be better for her to just turn around and go back to his apartment, right now. She expressed her doubts to Enol with a total lack of speech.<sup>4</sup>

Enol stared at his shoes and replied by not asking her a question.<sup>5</sup>

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example of his misuse of footnotes. He could very easily have replaced the word "completest" {A word which, by the way, doesn't exist [I mean, oh sure, this *is* a science fiction story, so the author can *pretend* that it exists by saying that's the way they say it on Kanteron 6 (A planet, which, by the way, also doesn't exist that could very easily have been replaced with the planet Earth {Though there is a sense in which a made-up alien planet is necessary to explain some of the strange things in the story, so, in that case, the planet could not be replaced with Earth and must remain Kanteron 6}), but this is really just an excuse to cover up the author's lack of proper grammar skills, because then he can say that these mistakes were done on purpose, just because that's the way they say it on Kanteron 6}} with the phrase "most complete."

<sup>1</sup> The author would especially like to apologize for that last footnote, as it was unnecessarily long, confusing, and most of what was said in it was completely and utterly beside the point.

<sup>2</sup> At this point, the author wishes to offer his sincerest apologies to all those who have wasted their precious time reading his footnotes. He knows there is nothing that he can do or say that will ever make up for your lost time, but he does assure you that, from this point on, he will do his absolute best to not use anymore footnotes, whatsoever.

<sup>3</sup> After this one.

<sup>4</sup> And this one.

<sup>5</sup> Unless he changes his mind.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Sorry.

## **Chapter 10**

### **The Truth About Lying**

As Quipsar hung her two new glazers on the flazer rack, she wondered if Gasper had also invented a glazer rack. After all, it just didn't seem right to hang a glazer on a flazer rack. She would have to ask him about it the next time she saw him. While she was at it, it might also be a good idea to get another glazer, just in case two weren't enough.

Enol removed the glazer that Quipsar had made him buy for himself and sat down in his stylishly tacky chair. For some reason, he felt uneasy. He couldn't quite figure out what it was, but he knew something was wrong. He felt as if he'd forgotten something. Then, after a moment, he happened to notice that every window in the apartment had been broken out. "The kid ..."

Quipsar looked away from her glazers in surprise. "Oh, no! I forgot all about him! We should have gotten him a glazer, too."

"Never mind that. Just help me look for him."

The two then made a thorough search of the apartment, which revealed to them that the kid was not there and that they were out of laundry detergent. "Crud," said Enol. "I don't remember anything like this on 'Daddy Knows What to Do,' at all ..."

Quipsar asked, "Why don't we go downstairs and talk to the security guard?"

"Geez, Quipsar, our kid's missing. I don't know if this is really the time for conversing with the hired help."

"No," she clarified, "I mean the security guard might have seen him if he left the building."

Enol said, "Right. Good idea," and led her downstairs.

Just inside the entrance, a security guard was sitting in his chair, doing whatever it is that security guards do. Presumably, this had something to do with protecting the safety of the people who lived in the building. The fact that it looked like a guy lazing about while he's supposed to be working was obviously just some sort of clever cover.

According to the tag on his shirt, this particular guard's name was Rungli. Apparently, the fact that you knew his name was meant to create a nice, friendly atmosphere or something. Enol wasn't quite sure how that was supposed to work, but he did know that, if he had a name like Rungli, he'd probably want to keep it to himself.

Enol's shirt, on the other hand, said, "Supersonic Sportswear." That was strange. This had to be at least the fiftieth guy Rungli'd seen named Supersonic Sportswear. He knew that wearing your name on your shirt helped to create a friendly atmosphere where everybody knew everybody else, but, if he had a name like Supersonic Sportswear, he'd probably want to pretend that it was the name of a clothing manufacturer.

"Good evening, Mr. Sportswear."

"Er ... Excuse me?"

"I said, 'Good evening,'" explained Rungli. "It's a greeting. People say it to each other when they meet in the evening, assuming that it's a good one."

"No," said Enol. "After that ... What did you call me?"

"Mr. Sportswear. It's right there on your shirt."

"What?" Enol looked at his chest in confusion. "No, that's not my name ..."

"Of course it isn't, sir."

"No, really," said Enol, "that's the name of a clothing manufacturer."

"Of course it is, sir."

"No, honestly ... It is ... My name's Enol Vasphouden."

"It's okay, sir," Rungli assured him. "I'm not here to judge you."

With great difficulty, Enol restrained himself from asking just what the hell kind of name was Rungli, anyway, and instead asked, "Did you see a little kid come through here? He's kind of weird ... Maybe carrying a faseball bat."

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“He left about an hour ago.”

“Ah, yes. I don’t suppose he happened to mention precisely where he was headed off to?”

“No,” said Rungli, “but don’t worry, sir. We’ll catch him.”

A confused expression popped up to pay Enol’s face a quick visit. “Er ... I’m sorry?”

“Oh, you didn’t know?” asked the guard. “He’s been running around here being a nuisance. He used his faseball bat to break every single window in the building. People have been calling to complain about him all day.”

“Oh ...” Enol’s confused expression said goodbye and wandered off, leaving his face open to new visitors.

“Kids, today,” said Rungli, “I just don’t understand them. I mean ... Sure, when I was little, I might go and break a couple of windows every now and then, but at least I had the decency to blame it on an evil clown. Does he do that? No, he knocks on your door and says, ‘Hello, I’m here to break your windows, now.’ Kids today have no respect. I blame the movies.”

“Well,” said Enol, receiving a visit from a trying-not-to-look-suspicious expression, “just out of curiosity, with no personal interest in the matter, whatsoever ... what are you going to do when you catch him?”

“Oh,” said Rungli, “we’re just going to ask him if he broke the windows. If he says no, we have to let him go.”

“That doesn’t sound so bad. What if he says yes?”

“If he says yes,” answered the guard with a smile, “we get to shoot him.”

“Oh ...” An I’m-trying-not-to-look-worried expression stopped by for a quick cup of frompe.

“It’s been a while since we’ve got to shoot anybody,” said Rungli, “so, personally, I’m kind of hoping for the yes.”

“Er ... Of course,” said Enol. “I’ve ... Um ... I’ve got to be going, now ... My wife wants me to ... Um ... Thanks for your time, bye.”

“Don’t mention it, Mr. *Vasphouden*.”

Enol ignored the guard’s insolence and rushed outside with Quipsar. They paused on the other side of the door, trying to figure out where they should look first. After a few minutes of examining their surroundings, Quipsar pointed and said, “Hey! Look over there!”

Enol’s eyes followed her finger to the No-Glass Emporium. A sign on the door read, “We Have Everything Except Windows.” Before he

could react, though, he noticed a big, bright, flashing neon sign with the words “Glass Factory.” Hmm ... Enol looked from one building to the other. What to do ... If he were a kid with a window-breaking fetish, where would he go?

After a thorough search of the No-Glass Emporium turned up nothing, the two of them entered the Glass Factory, where their feet crunched down on glass that had not only been broken but actually ground down into a fine powder. This powder—apparently all that remained of an untold number of windows—covered the floor like some strange kind of silica snow. Dernkid was standing directly in the center of this blizzard with the offending fbaseball bat lying at his feet.

Enol slowly—and crunchingly—walked up to Dernkid and asked him, “Did you do this?”

Dernkid considered the question. “No.”

This was it, then. “Son, I’d like to talk to you about lying. You see, sometimes we’re afraid to get in trouble, so we lie, but lying is never right, no matter how much trouble you might get into. Now, I’m going to ask you, again, and, this time, I want you to tell me the truth. Did you break these windows?”

Dernkid blinked. “Yes.”

Feeling very proud of himself, Enol took Dernkid by the hand and said, “Come on, kid.” As the three of them left the Glass Factory, it occurred to Enol that he could feel the bonding, already. This kid loved him!

Dernkid wondered why the strange person who referred to himself as “Dad” wouldn’t let go of his hand. The significance of this strange ritual was lost on him. He wished the weirdo would just let go.

Quipsar wondered if a pink glazer might go better with her new socks.

Rungli wondered how Supersonic Sportswear and his female companion with the abundantly-armed coat had located their glass-breaking culprit so quickly.

Three seconds later, there was a gun pressed against Dernkid’s temple, and a voice was yelling into his ear, “Are you the kid who broke all of the windows in that apartment building?”



## Chapter 11

### Some Lies About the Truth

A very disappointed and upset Enol stormed into the apartment and slammed the door shut. He tried to regain his composure. After some time, he felt that he could speak without getting too emotional. He was wrong.

He screamed out, “No? How could you tell him no!?”

Dernkid remained silent—but breathing—as he closely examined his fingernail.

Quipsar put forth her own observation, “Do you think it might possibly have had something to do with the gun that was pointed at his head?”

“Well, yes,” admitted Enol, “but I thought we had an understanding. We were *bonding*.”

“So, you’d prefer he just get shot in the head?”

“No, of course not. Don’t be ridiculous. I’m not saying I wish he was dead or anything, but ...”

“But what?” she asked. “If he’d listened to you, he would be dead, now.”

Dernkid had never really taken the time to look at his fingernail, before. He’d always been so busy with tape-sticking that he had never noticed the intense joy and delight that were contained in one’s finger-

nail.

Predictably enough, Enol argued, "Look, Quipsar, did little Mibby lie when he was down in that well? No. And do you know why? Because Daddy told him not to. Now, how can Daddy do what he knows to do if little Mibby is a lying, no-good son of a female groblek?"

Quipsar rolled her eyes insultingly and said, "What are you thinking? You don't stand a chance of being elected without a cute, little kid."

Dernkid was starting to lose interest in his fingernail. Now that he thought about it, maybe it wasn't all that fascinating, after all.

"Maybe, but ..."

"What were you planning to do?" asked Quipsar. "Were you going to take him to public events and say, 'This is Dernkid. Forgive him if he seems a bit shy. It's just that he's been a little dead, lately.'"

"I'm just saying ..."

"Or maybe, 'He might smell a little funny, but we still love him.'"

Dernkid wasn't quite sure why the male and female were communicating via higher-than-normal volumes, but he had the vague idea that it might have something to do with old FV shows.

Enol said, "Look, Quipsar, I just happen to believe that, if a father tells his son to do something, he should do it."

"Just like you did everything your father told you?"

"Yes ... No ... Well, I mean ... That was different. He was wrong."

Quipsar sighed and asked, "Why can't you just be satisfied that you still have a cute, little kid to parade around in front of your constituents?"

"How can I have a cute, little kid who's a big, fat liar?"

"Okay, I give up," she said resignedly.

"Right." Enol turned, grabbed the boy by the shoulders and began to interrogate. "Okay, Dernkid, why did you tell that man no?"

That was easy. "You said, 'Tell the truth.'"

"But," observed Enol, "that wasn't the truth. You did break the windows."

"Not all of them."

"What?"

Dernkid reminded him, "An eight-foot-tall man with a top hat, two eye patches, a hook, and a four-armed flazer climbed up the fire escape and broke one of them."

## **Chapter 12**

### **The Big Groblek**

The first thing Enol noticed was the giant groblek. This was probably to be expected. In the normal course of everyday events, one didn't tend to see a lot of man-sized talking grobleks walking about on two legs. It wasn't a real groblek, of course. It was just a guy in a groblek suit selling t-shirts featuring witty phrases emblazoned across the chests in big, colorful, eye-catching letters. He presented the discerning political aficionado with the opportunity to demonstrate their unwavering support by purchasing outfits with such slogans as "Ponies love Kanteron 6, so, if you don't vote for the ponies, then you must hate it" and "If you vote for the hippos, you're a stupid-head." It was all part of the ponies' new "vote for us" strategy. After much heavy deliberation and debate, they had finally come to the conclusion that the best way to tell the people about their plans for the planet was to dress a guy up in a groblek suit and have him sell promotional t-shirts.

So far, this plan seemed to be working fairly well. While the Supreme Ruler was still up for grabs, the ponies seemed to have most of the lower positions in the palms of their hands, barring some catastrophic catastrophe of catastrophic proportions.

Naturally, the hippos were hard at work to find a way to counter this. They had already introduced their own guy in a groblek suit, but, much

to their chagrin, this strategy met with only a limited amount of success, owing to the fact that the ponies' groblek suit was much more convincing and had a more pleasant odor. Currently, the hippos were working on a method of genetically-engineering an actual, living, man-sized talking groblek which could be trained to sell not only t-shirts but also frompe mugs, writing utensils, and countless other promotional items. The odor of this groblek would be controlled by Smelgud Perspiration Repellent, which numerous sports stars in countless FV commercials had assured them would do away with even the toughest of odors while, at the same time, leaving behind no unappealing residue.

This was Enol's first ever group convention. Here, politicians came from all over the world to join their respective groups and announce their candidacy for various offices to an ecstatic crowd of rabid political fans and people too cheap to go to the movies instead. Enol's first task, here, was to figure out what to do about this whole group nonsense. The convention featured someone called a Group Advisor. Apparently, it was the Group Advisor's duty to help up-and-coming politicians choose the group that was best for them. Since all of the other politicians had already up-and-came or came-and-gone, the line outside the Advisor's office was noticeably short. In fact, one might even argue that it was noticeably nonexistent.

On Kanteron 6, politics were something that people rarely got into late in life. For that matter, they were something that people rarely got into early in life, either. The most popular way to enter Kanteron 6 politics is to be born into it. Studies have shown that approximately 103% of all Kanteronian politicians were born to political families (with a 2% margin of error). There are a couple of theories on this. The first is that the whole business of Kanteronian politics is so horrifically wretched that the only way anyone would ever even consider being a part of it is if they had no other choice. The other is that the Kanteronian public casts their votes based primarily on name recognition. Thus, the only way for any person to be elected is if that person has the same last name as another politician.

Enol slowly made his way down the nonexistent line and to the door marked "Yiar Studabich - Group Advisor." It sounded as if the Group Advisor were performing some immensely important task which bore a remarkable audial resemblance to human snoring. Enol was hesitant to interrupt but was sorely in need of a good advising, and there didn't appear to be anyone else around here who might prove to be capable of

providing him with one. Thus, he gathered up his courage and knocked.

Inside, the sound of the immensely important task ceased and was replaced with the rustling sound of someone who's quickly trying to make it look as if they haven't just woken up. Then, the rustling ended, and a voice called out, "Next, please," despite the fact that there had quite obviously been no previous.

Upon entering the room, Enol found himself face to face with Yiar Studabich, a disturbingly pleasant man who had the annoying habit of not pausing between his sentences. Upon seeing Enol, Yiar seemed suddenly very happy; presumably, he was pleased to finally have something to do for a change. "Hello, there, nice to meet you, what can I do for you?"

"Hi," answered Enol, sitting down in the dull, brown chair<sup>1</sup> positioned in front of the desk. "I'm Enol Vasphouden. I'm going to be running for Supreme Ruler, and ..."

"Please," said Yiar, "take a seat." Before Enol could comment that he had already taken one, Yiar continued, "We could always use a good Supreme Ruler."

"Er ... Yes," said Enol, hoping to have the chance to complete his current thought before the man started talking, again. "I understand that you can help me with this whole political group thing. See, I ..."

"Why, yes, certainly, I can, I can, I can, that's what I'm here for, so what are you looking for in a group?"

Enol gave the question some thought. After a bit, he answered, "I want a group that's working to make Kanteron 6 a better place. I want my group to support tax reform; better care for the elderly; the creation of a new fourteen-dollar bill, featuring the face of Kilo Jopset, star of FV's 'Slomac;' and quite possibly ..."

Yiar interrupted, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, just a minute there, cheeky-chops, I think you've got your priorities a teensy bit confused."

"Er ..."

"Listen to yourself, you're sitting here, telling me about your own personal beliefs, presumably expecting me to reach into my desk and

<sup>1</sup> The chair was not appallingly tacky because those involved in politics preferred not to take part in fads. They took themselves very seriously, which, in itself, caused a lot of people to laugh at them. So as not to exacerbate the problem, they thought it best to avoid fashions that were eventually just going to go out of style. Hence, they created their own never-changing type of fashion that would never actually come into style, much less go out of it.

extract a file on some political group that shares them all.”

A very confused Enol said, “But ... I thought that’s what you were here for ... I ...”

“Well, yes, sort of, but your beliefs shouldn’t come into play just yet.”

“They shouldn’t?”

“No, of course not,” said Yiar, as if this were the most obvious thing in the world and Enol should feel like an even bigger fool than he already did for not knowing it.

“I don’t get it ... I ...”

Yiar laughed. “Obviously, you see, you don’t choose a political group based on your beliefs, you change your beliefs to fit with those of your political group, right now you want to focus on the important things, like which group will help you get elected, you see, the ponies are more popular right now, so, if you manage to win the pre-election and become the official nominee, you’ll have a better chance of winning the election, however, due to their popularity, they’ll have more supporters, meaning that it could be difficult to win the pre-election, with the hippos, on the other hand, you’ll have a better chance of winning the pre-election, but you’ll have to work hard to beat the ponies’ nominee in the election, assuming you can make it that far.”

“Er ...” said Enol. “Shouldn’t I at least try to pick a group that will support the promises I’m going to be making during the campaign?”

Yiar chuckled at Enol’s rudimentary understanding of the fundamental intricacies of politics. “Your naïveté is refreshing, but promises don’t matter, everyone always makes the same promises, lower taxes, raise earnings, improve the economy, blah, blah, blah, no one ever makes bad promises like, ‘I promise to murder the secondborn child of every household,’ the two things that actually get you elected are your personality and your political group, and, if you don’t mind me saying, you should probably make sure you get a good political group because, from what I’ve seen, your personality sure isn’t going to do it.”

“Well, I thought that ... Hey! Wait a minute ...”

“So, what are you, Mr. Vasphouden, a pony or a hippo?”

“No one’s even explained to me why I need a political group,” said Enol. “Can’t people vote for me if I’m not in one?”

“Well ... Technically, I suppose ...”

“So,” argued Enol, “why do I need one? I mean, are people expected to vote for me just because my name is associated with a group that was associated with the name of some other, more popular politician?”

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“Well ... Sort of ...”

“So, what’s the point?”

In an effort to explain just what the point was, Yiar began the speech he’d given countless times before, mostly in dilapidated gymnasiums, to groups of young, impressionable high school students, in hastily organized presentations on Kanteron 6 government. It was the speech that everyone in his position gave, memorized word for word from *The Official Kanteron 6 Group Guide*. “200 years ago,<sup>1</sup> the founding fathers of Kanteron 6 government envisioned a society which would be governed by the members of that society.”

“I think I’ve heard this one,” said Enol.

“In this government, the people would have the right to choose their own leaders, thereby ensuring that the views of the leaders would be the same as those of the common man. However, having a high number of people running for office could get confusing.”

“Hey, didn’t you come to my high school?”

“Thus, to protect the people from the dangers of having a lot of choices and thinking too much, the group system was implemented. Now, elections are narrowed down to a nice, easy, simple choice between two highly-qualified candidates, either of which would make a fine addition to the planet’s illustrious lineage of leaders.”

“Um ... Okay ...”



Enol wandered around backstage, trying to prepare himself for the audience he was about to speak to. He’d planned to write a nice, little speech but had kept putting it off for reasons that had seemed good enough at the time. Now, he felt like a doofus for not having a speech ready when everyone else here had any army of speechwriters who had been slaving away for months to ensure that each syllable was pleasing to the ear while, at the same time, phrasing sentences in such a way as to avoid offending potential supporters.

The entire backstage area was filled with ponies and hippos being given last-minute advice on their impending presentations. Noticeably absent were the lesser-known crud groups.<sup>2</sup> They had been denied the

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<sup>1</sup> It had actually been 247 years, but it had been some time since the book had last been updated. Also, several people were of the opinion that 200 was simply a much nicer number, anyway.

<sup>2</sup> The word crud refers to groups other than the ponies and ... continued on page 60

opportunity of addressing the planet at most of the major political conventions. Many excuses were given for this, but, in the end, it was unclear whether the crud groups were excluded because they had no chance of winning or if they had no chance of winning because they'd been excluded.

Now, as Enol walked past an advisor giving advice to his advisee on how to correctly pronounce the letter "Q" in the most pleasing manner possible, he wondered how he could ever hope to compete with the droves of candidates who had been preparing for this for their entire lives. They were professionals, while he was just some guy who wanted to make the planet a happier place. His only hope was to somehow manage to stand out. He was going to have to get noticed.



"If elected, I intend to continue the pony tradition of doing the things you want me to do while, at the same time, doing none of the things that you don't like. Thank you, and remember: Vote for Harle-tow."

"Unlike my competition, I plan to do good things while not doing bad ones. When you vote, keep in mind that Bardonich is a hippo who does good things."

"If elected, I promise to refrain from killing the secondborn child in every household."

Enol waited nervously. The crowd here was not as large as some of the others he would likely find himself in front of before this was all over with, but to him it was still quite intimidating. The largest audience Enol had ever addressed had consisted of fourteen of his fellow high school students, and the only reason he hadn't ended up looking like a fool then was mainly due to the fact that the kid who went before him had not only peed his pants but also the pants of several of the audience members. Enol supposed it was technically possible that one of these experienced speech-givers might follow in that boy's footsteps, but he thought that it was, most likely, not something he was going to be able to

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hippos. It is a combination of the names Cromec and Lanud. Ioma Cromec and Kaplain Lanud were the founders of the planet's first ever crud group, the opossums. The main goal of the opossums was to implement a new method of government which would forgo the bribery and corruption inherent in the current system by giving the titles of Supreme and Assistant Ruler directly to the two richest people on the planet, who, at that time, just happened to be Ioma Cromec and Kaplain Lanud.



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count on.

Enol waited. Someone promised to uphold the people's values. Someone else promised to do what was asked of them. Another person promised to give away free money.

Finally, a voice said, "Ernol Vespoodem, you're up next."

Too nervous to correct the stagehand, Enol walked onstage and took the microphone. He anxiously scanned the audience, still unsure of whether he actually wanted to say what he was about to. Finally, he cleared his throat and began, "Ladies ... Gentlemen ... Kanteronians of non-standard gender ... My name is Enol Vaspounden. When I came here, today, I wished to become Supreme Ruler so that I could make the world a better place, but, being relatively new to politics, I was unsure which group to join. Now, after much heavy consideration and internal debate, I've finally come to a decision: Groups are stupid, and I'm not going to be in one. Thank you, and vote for me."

Suddenly, there was a noticeable change in air pressure as everyone in the building gasped simultaneously. While it is impossible to say whether the silence that followed was due to shock or the resulting depressurization, one thing was certain: For better or worse, the name Ernol Vespoodem would not be soon forgotten.



## Chapter 13

### Fame in a Can

“Enol Vasprounden. Who is he, where does he come from, and what the hell does he think he’s doing? Enkli.”

“Enol Vasprounden seems like a bright, young man. He’s probably been studying politics for years, just waiting for the perfect time to present himself to the public. I must say that this new concept of groupless politics is, admittedly, somewhat shocking, but I think it could be promising. As long as he doesn’t make any major mistakes, I think Vasprounden is a shoe-in for Supreme Ruler.”

“Yartle.”

“Enol Vasprounden is a dope. He obviously doesn’t know a thing about politics. He can’t even grasp the simple concept of a political group. He thinks he can just come in and make a name for himself by shocking everyone. I hope he loses ... No, I hope he dies. I hope he dies in a freak manufacturing accident and has the ground-up remains of his bones mixed in with toilet porcelain. What an idiot.”

“Wespi.”

“I don’t know. I’ll have to wait till I see his ads.”



Gaspar used the remote control to switch off the FV from the

comfort of one of his appallingly tacky purple chairs. (The fashion had since changed to blue, but he couldn't figure out how to make his chairs do blue. He'd managed to figure purple out just in time to only be three days behind the current trend.) "Well," he said, "you certainly seem to have gotten yourself noticed."

From the comfort of the other purple chair, Enol asked, "Did that guy just call me a dope?"

After a moment of thought, Gasper nodded. "Yes, I think he did."

"Did he then," asked Enol, "insinuate that he might like to relieve himself in the remains of my corpse?"

"Get used to it. You're famous, now."

Enol began to think that maybe fame was not quite so much fun as he'd always thought it would be. "Well, what did I ever do to him?"

Gasper explained, "You got famous and said something he didn't agree with."

"Oh ..." Enol considered this for a moment. He didn't agree that his bones should be used as a waste receptacle, so he thought of asking whether it would be okay to say some equally unpleasant thing about the person who'd said it. After a moment, though, he decided that he had more important things to talk about.

Instead, he asked, "What do we do, now?"

"An interview," answered Gasper.

"Right now? But there's no one listening to us. What's the ..."

"No," said Gasper, "not now and not with me. Everyone's going to want to talk to you, so you've got to do the interview where the most people will see it."

Enol thought for a second and suggested, "Kanteron 6 Today?"

Gasper shook his head.

"Galaxy News Now?"

"No," said Gasper, "I mean the late night talk shows."



Enol walked into the green room. He was sure the fact that it was green was significant for some reason that he couldn't quite put his finger on. He quickly decided, though, that green was probably not the best color for a room to be. The room was dull ... And ugly ... And not very interesting ... Except for the fact that it contained a man sitting on a couch. Normally, this in itself wouldn't be particularly exciting. The man was a stocky, dark-haired fellow in a suit and tie. He was built very much

like a hard-boiled FV cop, which is to say he bore very little resemblance to any of the planet's real-life crime-fighters. What was interesting about the man, though, was his name, which happened to be Kilo Jopset.

"Wow, Kilo Jopset!" said Enol excitedly. "I'm your biggest fan."

Kilo Jopset looked him over and said, "No, you're not, and I should know. I have the world's biggest fan. He weighs 1,287 kilos.<sup>1</sup>"

"Well ... Okay ... But still ... It's a real honor to meet you."

"Yes," agreed Kilo Jopset, "it usually is."

Enol racked his brain. He was almost certain that he'd had a hundred questions set aside to ask in the eventuality that he should ever happen to meet Kilo Jopset. Now that he'd actually met him, however, he couldn't seem to think of any of them. Instead, he said, "If I'm elected, I'm going to make a fourteen-dollar bill with your face on it."

"Is that so?"

"Oh, yes." Enol nodded enthusiastically. "And it can ... Well ... You know ... Be used to buy things that cost fourteen dollars." He paused for a moment, then admitted, "Okay ... \$13.33 plus tax."

Suddenly, something Enol had said seemed to have an impact on the FV star. "Did you say elected?"

Enol nodded.

"Say, you're that Enol Vesphoodem kid, aren't you?"

"Actually, it's Enol Vasphounden," corrected Enol.

Kilo Jopset didn't seem to care. "Yeah, whatever, kid. Just know that you're making a big mistake."

"Er ..."

"Politics is a tough game," continued Kilo Jopset. "If you ask me—and you probably should—you'd better step aside and let the big boys play."

"Actually," disagreed Enol, "it seems pretty easy, so far."

"It isn't," argued Kilo Jopset. "It's very difficult. It takes years of experience. You should give up, now, before you end up making a fool of yourself."

Enol pointed out, "I make a fool of myself on a daily basis. I don't see how this'll be any worse."

"Well, it will," insisted Kilo Jopset. "Take my advice. Get out now, or you'll regret it later on."

Before Enol could reply to this, a woman's head popped in through

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<sup>1</sup> Due to Kilo Jopset's overwhelming popularity, the Kanteronian unit of weight, the mempry, had been renamed the kilo.

the open door and said, "Kilo Jopset, you're on."

Kilo Jopset said, "Remember what I told you," and left the room.

Enol was downhearted. It was quite dispiriting to hear the person he respected and admired more than anyone else on the planet tell him to give up. Kilo Jopset was his hero ... Perhaps if he'd explained his plans for a government-funded candy bar distribution program ... Well, it wouldn't do to worry too much about it, for the moment. He needed to prepare himself for his upcoming FV appearance. He was quite nervous. He needed to find a way to relax.

Enol looked around the room. There was a green wall, a green couch, and a green table filled with green magazines with green writing printed on green paper with green pictures of what he could only assume were green things, which seemed rather like a waste of paper to him. For lack of something better to do, he attempted to solve a green crossword puzzle but met with little success.

Finally, he decided to just sit down and watch a little bit of green FV. He picked up the green remote control and pressed the green power button, causing green images to emanate from the green screen. Enol was annoyed, but a bit of fiddling with the green color knobs helped get the FV to a more watchable state.

Kilo Jopset was on. He was talking with Himber Lagcroft, Kanteron 6's most popular late night talk show host. It took Enol a minute to realize that this must be what was happening, right now. He wondered what they were saying to each other. For the moment, the FV appeared to be mute.

Enol had to search for a second before he managed to locate the green volume knob. Upon twisting it to the right, however, he heard Himber Lagcroft's voice say, "... an announcement to make, Kilo Jopset."

"That's right, Himber," Kilo Jopset replied, "I came here, tonight, to reveal to the Kanteron 6 public that I, Kilo Jopset, star of FV's 'Slomac,' will be running for the hippos' Supreme Ruler candidacy."



Himber Lagcroft stared from behind the desk on Enol's left and smiled at him in a deprecatingly friendly manner.

Kilo Jopset stared at him from the couch on his right, eagerly hoping for him to do something stupid.

An audience of about a hundred people stared at him, waiting for

anything they could laugh at.

Enol's life flashed in front of his eyes. Well, he thought to himself, at least it's not as if it's been a particularly interesting one.

"So, Mr. Vaspounden," said Himber, "tell me ... What is it you feel you can offer the planet that Kilo Jopset can't?"

Enol shifted nervously under the sardonic politeness of his interviewer's gaze. "Well ... I'm going to make Kanteron 6 a better place. I think I've pinpointed the reason that so many Kanteronians are unhappy ..."

Himber turned to face the camera and did that funny, little smirk he did in every episode. When he turned back, he asked, "Is that so?"

"Well ..."

Enol was cut off by Kilo Jopset's muffled snickering. He attempted to ignore it, but, before he could make a good attempt at blocking it out, Himber began speaking to him, again.

"But, Enol, I mean, really ... Just how much experience do you have when compared to someone like, say, Kilo Jopset, whose hit FV series 'Slomac' has been viewed by countless planetary leaders over the years? Do *you* have *your* own FV show?"

"Well ... No ... Not really ... But ..."

Kilo Jopset suddenly broke in, "Now, now, don't cut yourself short, Enol. I'm sure you've made plenty of guest appearances in convenience store security videos."

The audience found this amusing—or at least the applause sign informed them that they did.

"Oh, yes," said Himber. "I do believe I remember seeing your seminal performance in 'Voolberry Road Fast-Shop, 5PM-6PM.'"

"Listen ..."

There was more laughter from the audience and from Kilo Jopset, who added, "Weren't you nominated for a free soda for that one?"

"I rather think this is beside the point," Enol attempted to reason.

Himber nodded. "Oh, yes, yes." Then, after a final giggle, he asked, "Convenience stores aside, Enol, do you *really* think you can compete with Kilo Jopset?"

"Well ... Sure ... I suppose ..."

From the other side of Enol's head came the voice of Kilo Jopset, saying, "What kind of a question is that, now, Himber? Certainly, the Kanteronian voters will be drawn in by his policies on half-priced canned meats."

Enol spun around and glared at the FV star. "Listen, you bloody

*actor*, this is politics, not your damned FV show, and I'd like to remind you that, when it comes to running a political campaign, *you* have no bloody idea what the hell *you're* doing, either."

The applause signs affixed to the ceiling bore no preset instructions for dealing with an eventuality such as this, but, luckily, the audience seemed to figure it out for themselves as, at this insult to one of their favorite actors, they all gasped simultaneously.

Enol looked around at the silent faces, blinked a couple of times, and said, "Wow ... I'm getting pretty good at this."



"Enol Vasphouden. Political genius or complete idiot? Enkli."

"I'm liking Vasphouden more and more every day. With last night's appearance on Himber Lagcroft, he showed an amazing ability to stand up to adversity by pointing out the blindingly obvious. He's got my vote."

"Yartle."

"Vasphouden is still a dope. He's cold-heartedly insulted one of Kanteron 6's most beloved public figures. The public will see that he's just making waves in a desperate bid for attention. He doesn't stand a chance."

"Wespi."

"Have they started showing the ads, yet?"



## **Chapter 14**

### **Showing the Ads**

Gaspar needed a breath of fresh air. So, for that matter, did Enol. The prospect of running a political campaign against a major FV star like Kilo Jopset had left the both of them gasping for oxygen.

The only places left on Kanteron 6 that had anything remotely resembling fresh air were the handful of public parks scattered across the planet. In fact, the freshness of this air was rather questionable. Since Kanteronians generally found real trees to be disappointingly unfashionable, most of these parks also came equipped with a large assortment of much more modern mechanical trees, which were powered by coal. Many wondered why this was necessary, but the scientists who had been hired by the coal corporations to design the machines assured everyone that their research showed no other practical way of building trees.

Naturally, the first thing Enol and Gaspar did upon arrival was to stop by the park frompe shop to get a couple of #33's. With drinks in hand, the two returned outside, to the pseudo-fresh air, and sat down on a park bench near a metal oak that was steadily releasing exhaust fumes into the atmosphere.

Enol took a deep breath. "Ah ... Smell that air."

Gaspar nodded. "Yes, nice isn't it? They have much better exhaust here than in the city."

Enol thought he could talk about the quality of park fumes all day long, but, right now, he had other things on his mind. "Okay. I'm running against Kilo Jopset. What do we do, now?"

Gaspar thought long and hard about this question before he finally suggested, "Panic?"

"Well ... Yes, I suppose we could do that, but I don't think it will help us very much."

"Hmm ... Crud ..."

"You're my marketing advisor, Gaspar. Pull it together."

"Can't we just talk about the trees, instead?" He pointed at a tall, metallic object in front of them. "See, there's a pretty pink one."

Enol shook his head. "You've got to help me win."

"I've got writer's block."

"What?"

"I don't know what to do. Kilo Jopset ... I mean ... How can we hope to compete with that?"

"Say something good about me."

"Well," said Gaspar, "you're a pretty interesting guy ..."

"Okay, yes," said Enol, "I suppose that's a start."

"... Almost as interesting as Kilo Jopset."

"No, I don't think that's the wisest campaign strategy ... Just ... Well ... Why do you think people should vote for me?"

"Er ..." Gaspar stared at the grass while he considered a possible reply. He wondered why nobody had ever bothered to make mechanical grass. After pondering this for a bit, he came back to Enol's question. "Well, you're a nice guy ... and you'll make Kanteron 6 a better place."

"Yes, that's good. Now, you just take that and air it on FV or print it on frompe mugs or something."

Gaspar nodded. "Yeah, okay ... I think I can do that."

"See? It's not so hard, is it?"

"I don't know ... What I'd really like, though, are some pictures of you with the kid and that hot wife of yours. That'll make you look like a nice family man. People think family men are nifty."

Enol smiled, inhaling pleasantly toxic fumes. "That's great. That's exactly what I need. I need you to find out what the people want and convince them that I'll give it to them."

"Hmm ... That gives me an idea ..."



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In the heart of The Kanteron 6 Center for Shopping and Goods Acquisition,<sup>1</sup> shoppers were often likely to see tables with boxes on them. These boxes normally came equipped with a hole in the top and were generally positioned next to a stack of small pieces of paper. The idea was that people could write their names and addresses on these pieces of paper and place them in the box. The purpose for this was either to give the public a chance at winning fabulous prizes—like a trip to Kanteron 7, a new mode of transportation, or a chance to be in the latest big budget movie, where they would most likely play the part of Guy in Background in That One Scene—or for certain companies to collect as many addresses as possible so they can send people advertisements for things they don't want.

This particular day was slightly different, though. In addition to the usual boxes, there was one that didn't offer any prize at all. Instead, it had a picture of some guy named Enol Vasphouden and the words, "What do you want?" written in bright, red letters.



The next day, Gasper gave a presentation in his apartment based on the results of his experiment. As a visual aid, he had a graph filled with lines and squiggles that Enol could never possibly even hope to understand. Pointing to a spot on one of the squiggles, Gasper began, "With one vote was more dangerous toxins." Pointing at another spot, he revealed, "Three people want to legalize public urination." Gasper paused for a moment, then asked, "Do you want to write any of this down?"

"Um ... No," said Enol. "Please ... Go on ..."

"Right," said Gasper, who then proceeded to point to a spot on the graph that looked suspiciously exactly like a spot he had already pointed at. Enol began to wonder if Gasper had just drawn some random lines on a piece of paper to make his presentation seem more professional. "Fifteen people want to repeal the ban on Voodavog-Sunny-Day-Makers. Twenty-six want to play the part of Guy in Background in That One Scene in the next big budget movie. Thirty-four want more money. Fifty-seven want a long distance phone plan that works for them. And, with a whopping three hundred eighty-seven votes, the number one thing

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<sup>1</sup> Kanteronians had heard that, on some other planets, people often referred to such places as malls. Those on Kanteron 6, however, felt that such a word was much too short and uninteresting a name for so important a building.

people want is Kilo Jopset as Supreme Ruler.”

“Um ... I’m not sure that’s helpful ...”

“What do you mean?” asked Gasper. “Of course it is. Now, we know what the people want.”

“Yes,” agreed Enol, “but I’m not so sure it’s in our best interest to give it to them.”

“No, no, of course not,” said Gasper. “We just have to convince them to not want what they think they want.”

“What are you getting at?”



The reporter adjusted his microphone, leaned forward, and asked, “Kilo Jopset, Kanteron 6 wants to know ... Are you, in fact, a big, fat stupid-head?”

From a seat that, though comfortable enough, suddenly seemed to be very hot, Kilo Jopset answered, “No, I am not, nor have I ever been, a stupid-head of any sort.”

“But, in his campaign commercials, Enol Vaspounden clearly says, ‘Kilo Jopset is a big, fat stupid-head.’”

“That’s completely inaccurate. Enol Vaspounden has no grasp of politics, a fact he’s attempting to cover up with a series of weak-minded insults aimed at reducing the public’s confidence in my leadership abilities. Just look at me. Do I look big and fat? A little husky, maybe, but big and fat? That’s a stretch of the imagination. It’s simply not true.”

“Is it true that you wet the bed?”

“No, Vemlon, I do not wet the bed.”

“But, if that is the case,” inquired Vemlon, “then how do you explain Enol Vaspounden’s campaign ad in which he claims, ‘Kilo Jopset wets the bed?’”

“It’s not true. Where did he even get this information? Does he have witnesses? He can’t possibly back that claim up.”

“So, you’ve never wet the bed?”

Kilo Jopset shifted in his seat a bit. “Well ... Maybe when I was little, but that’s different. Everybody wets the bed when they’re little.”

“Do you think that, perhaps, Vaspounden simply misspoke and meant to say, ‘Kilo Jopset *used* to wet the bed when he was little?’”

“No. No, I don’t.”

## **Chapter 15**

### **The Sandwich**

Lots of people think they know everything. What set Embadel Linkwald apart from them was the fact that, in her case, it was true ... or at least very nearly true. There were, in fact, two things that Embadel did not know. The first was how she ended up knowing everything. She had just woken up one morning when she was sixteen and come to the realization that she now possessed all knowledge in the universe. The day before, she hadn't known everything. Though she hadn't thought so at the time, it now occurred to her that it would even be fair to say that she'd known relatively few things. In fact, just the day before, her teacher had asked her what the capital of Quesular 9 was, to which Embadel had obliviously replied, "I don't know."

The second thing Embadel didn't know was what to do. Here she was, possessor of all knowledge, and she didn't have a clue what to do about it. She knew how to end war. She knew how stop fighting. She knew how to bring peace and order throughout the galaxy. Every time she tried to tell someone how to go about doing it, though, her words became garbled and unintelligible. She wanted to make things better. She wanted to do good. Mostly, though, she just wanted to figure out why she knew everything.

In contemplating her sudden case of omniscience, Embadel had

managed to rule out things like scientific experimentation, radiation, genetic engineering, and high fiber diets. Unfortunately, none of this had ever brought her any closer to an actual solution. Over the years, Embadel had tried countless methods of discovering the roots of her knowledge ... Well, okay, they weren't really uncountable, of course. Embadel happened to know that there were exactly one thousand two hundred seventy-six of them, but that's a lot, which is the point. The fact that she already knew none of these one thousand two hundred seventy-six things would help in the least didn't stop her.

Today, for example, Embadel had visited a fortuneteller. After an hour of sitting there, listening to Madame Bomula telling her things she already knew about, Embadel left the shop, feeling no more enlightened than when she'd gone in. What Embadel knew that Madame Bomula didn't was that, thirty minutes later, a freak accident would draw the fortuneteller's shop into a parallel dimension. No matter, though. These sorts of things happened all the time. Usually no one noticed, primarily due to the fact that the places in question were generally replaced with other, very similar places which had also just been sucked in from other dimensions. Apart from adapting to the challenge of existence in five-dimensional space, Madame Bomula's life would go on much as it always had. Yes, existence, it seemed, was actually quite boring. Even more so for someone who already knew everything there was to know about it.

Thus, unlike so many other Kanteronians, Embadel Linkwald remained extraordinarily unsurprised when Kanteron 6's faucets ran red with mud.



It all started—as so many Kanteronian water stories do—at The Kanteron 6 Center for Dihydrogen Monoxide Distribution. A worker named Brentpur Nistol was on his lunch break, enjoying a nice hilonia<sup>1</sup> and klapdong<sup>2</sup> sandwich. As he was biting down on said sandwich, a bit of klapdong spurted out and landed in some of the machinery. The klapdong acted as a lubricant, allowing the machinery to run quicker and

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<sup>1</sup> Hilonia is a bizarre Kanteronian meat product. What makes it bizarre is the fact that it is composed entirely of animal parts that no one wishes to eat. Somehow, though, when ground up and mixed together in hilonia, the resulting substance becomes mysteriously edible.

<sup>2</sup> Klapdong is a condiment frequently used to improve the taste of Kanteronian sandwiches. This improvement is very much necessary, as hilonia tastes terrible.

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much more smoothly. This might have been a good thing if not for the fact that the machinery in question had been specifically designed to run slower and not-at-all smoothly. The lubricated machinery, therefore, caused quite an increase in pumping power, drawing a large quantity of mud into the system, which then piped it to every home on the planet.

It really freaked people out.



The Kanteronian public demanded an explanation. They got one. They weren't happy with it. They needed someone to blame for their horrible, thirty-minute ordeal. The Kanteron 6 Center for Dihydrogen Monoxide Distribution couldn't be held responsible because they hadn't really done anything. The worker, Brentpur Nistol, had only eaten a sandwich, thus satisfying one of his basic human needs, so he couldn't be blamed. Someone, however, had to be held accountable.

In this case, that someone turned out to be the food industry. They had created klapdong, which was clearly a hazardous product, and sold it to an unwitting public without properly warning them about its dangers. They had even gone so far as to market klapdong in such a way as to make people want to eat it. As other conspiracies were uncovered, it was revealed that, if one consumed large enough quantities of klapdong, he/she would gain weight and, thus, become less attractive. Even worse was the fact that inconclusive evidence demonstrated that the food industry might have even possibly gone so far as to aim klapdong ads at children.

Drastic action was called for ... Or at least dramatic political argument.



The ponies' pre-pre-election debate was composed almost solely of arguments over the safety of sandwich ingredients.

Olipal Mimsel was the first to bring up the subject when he said, "Klapdong is clearly dangerous. We must pass legislation to prevent the selling of klapdong to children. Individuals over the age of twenty-one should be issued a license to purchase it. In order to be awarded this license, they must first pass a standardized test on the dangers and possible ill effects of klapdong."

Arguing first on any subject is, generally speaking, a bad idea. Nestoy Talfot demonstrated the advantages of going second when he said, "That

isn't enough. We should illegalize klapdong, completely. No one should be allowed to manufacture or purchase it at any time for any reason, whatsoever."

Arcandle Opem then showed the benefits of going third. "That still isn't enough. Klapdong isn't the only dangerous product out there. We should do away with sandwiches of all kinds. The inconvenience of living in a world without sandwiches is worth it for the safety of our children."

Chicklebar Jansben then acted as a perfect example of the disadvantages of going last. "Um ... What they said ..."

Naturally, Arcandle Opem was the winner of the ponies' pre-election. Of course, he wasn't especially keen on living in a world without sandwiches. Even if he were, existing Kanteronian law would make illegalizing them quite difficult. Fortunately for him, though, everyone seemed to have forgotten about the whole sandwich thing two weeks later.



## **Chapter 16**

### **A Question of Etiquette**

So, the lineup was Arcandle Opem for the ponies, Kilo Jopset for the hippos, and Enol Vaspounden for himself. People still had trouble grasping this last concept. Some thought that Enol was a member of some new third group. These people were, for the most part, quite unaware of the fact that there were already several existing crud groups, which would have made it more like a new four hundred sixty-eighth group. Others were of the firm opinion that Enol was a loon. A third portion of the populace was simply amused by the fact that “Enol” rhymed with “phenol,” which was Kanteronian slang for “really bad thing you don’t want your name to rhyme with” and was considered by most people to be pretty much the most offensive word in the entire language.

Of the three, there was only one real politician among them. Kilo Jopset was counting on his existing fame to help him win. Enol was crossing his fingers, hoping that his newfound ability to be noticed, coupled with Gasper’s marketing prowess, would be his ticket to Supreme Ruler status. Arcandle Opem treated this in much the same way that he treated any other race: He let his supervisors handle everything.

Arcandle Opem’s main disadvantage was this: He was a real politician. Despite the fact that they don’t usually seem to mind voting for

them, people don't really like politicians. They especially don't like politicians when there is a well-liked FV star running against them. People think well-liked FV stars are nifty. Thus, Enol and Gasper both agreed that Kilo Jopset should be their main focus.



Right now, Quipsar Vasphouden was cooking dinner. Dernkid was helping his father set the table. They were the perfect family. They also happened to be in an FV commercial.

Outside of the FV, Quipsar was reorganizing her closet, which now consisted almost entirely of glazers; Enol was on the phone with Gasper, discussing the best methods of lying to the public; and Dernkid was performing a scientific experiment to see how many marshmallows he could cram into the video player. So far, he had three hundred sixty-seven. He wasn't sure, but he thought he could see the sides of the player actually beginning to bulge outwards. He hesitated for a moment as he wondered just what reason he could possibly have for wanting to insert marshmallows into an electronic device. Then, he decided that it probably wasn't that important, anyway, and proceeded to insert marshmallow #368.

As he was doing this, the latest FV ad featuring the happy Vasphouden family was just going off. Not that Dernkid noticed. He had yet to pick up on the concept that the colorful lights emanating from the big, black box were somehow meant to represent people, places, and things. The sounds, however, were perfectly clear, which is why it took him a moment to realize that it was Enol calling his name and not the FV, where a popular comedian had just made a joke about words that rhyme with "Enol."

"Hi, son, I need to talk to you for a moment."

Dernkid pretended to listen. The one who called himself "Dad" liked to talk a lot. It usually went faster when he pretended to listen. All he had to do was move his head up and down at every pause.

"Dernkid," said Enol, not the FV, "you, your mommy, and I are going to make a speech to the nice Kanteronians to show them what a good family we are. Don't you want to show the nice Kanteronians what a good family we are?"

Dernkid moved his head up and down.

"Good. First, I'm going to talk to the people. Then, your mommy is going to talk to the people. Then, we're going to give you the micro-

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phone ... You know what a microphone is?”

Dernkid moved his head up and down.

“Excellent. So, we’re going to give you the microphone, and I want you to say, ‘My Daddy says children are important. Kilo Jopset hasn’t said that, so, if you like children, you should vote for my Daddy.’ Do you think you can remember that?”

Dernkid moved his head up and down.

“Great! Now, I’ve got to go get ready. I don’t suppose you’d happen to know where my socks with the purple stripes are?”

Dernkid moved his head up and down.

“Oh, right,” said Enol, “I left them in the kitchen, didn’t I?”

Dernkid moved his head up and down.

“Ah, good. Well ... Go ahead and have fun doing ... whatever you’re doing.”

With that, Enol left to locate his socks, while Dernkid attempted to regain his previous train of thought. Now, let’s see ... Where was he? Ah, yes. Three hundred sixty-nine.



The crowd waited in anticipation. After a few minutes of this, they started to wait in moderate interest. Soon after, they proceeded to wait in complete apathy. Kanteronians have notoriously short attention spans. This, coupled with the fact that all major events on Kanteron 6 start at least five minutes late,<sup>1</sup> tends to lead to a lot of bored audiences. Most of the people were just here to see what shocking thing Vaspounden would say next, anyway.

Finally, the Vaspounden family emerged from backstage, where they had presumably been busy doing something important enough to make them five minutes late. Exactly what this something might be remained a mystery to all in attendance. The audience quickly ceased waiting for the presentation to begin and immediately started waiting for it to end, instead.

Enol spoke first. He approached the podium and picked up the

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<sup>1</sup> The reason for this is unclear. One theory proposes that Kanteron 6 lies at the center of a time vortex, which warps the flow of time in such a way that it passes five minutes slower in the watches of those who arrange public events. Another theory states that all Kanteronians are incredible procrastinators. Thus, no matter how far ahead of time any event is planned, they never actually begin preparing for it until five minutes beforehand.

microphone. "Good evening, everyone. As you all know, my name is Enol Vasphouden, and I intend to be your next Supreme Ruler."

The crowd waited in boredom.

"I will do lots of good things."

Half of the audience yawned.

"If elected, I will work hard to make Kanteron 6 a better place."

The other half of the audience yawned.

"I will strive to improve the economy, raise earnings, and, in general, make the planet a more pleasant place to live and work."

The half of the audience that yawned first did it, again.

"Without further adieu, I'd like to introduce you to my family. This is my lovely wife, Quipsar."

Ooh ... The wife was about to speak. This could be interesting.

"Hello, everybody. My husband is a wonderful man. He's a great father and a loving husband. If he's elected, I'm sure he will show Kanteron 6 the same kindness, compassion, and leadership that he's shown to us."

Nope. That wasn't so interesting, after all.

"Now, here's a word from our cute son, Dernkid."

Ooh ... Kids are pretty nifty.

Dernkid approached the podium, which was much too big for him. He stood to the left of it and took the microphone that was being offered to him. He looked at the crowd in front of him. Then, he looked at the microphone. Then, he looked at Enol, who gave him a smile and a hand gesture that was presumably meant to encourage him to go on. Dernkid looked back at the crowd, held the microphone up to his mouth, and said, "Phenol."

One of the audience members turned to another audience member and said, "It runs in the family, I see."

## **Chapter 17**

### **Damage Control**

“Holy phenol! What the phenol am I supposed to do, now!? Where the phenol did he hear that word at, anyway!? Phenol!”

Quipsar attempted to comfort her husband. “Maybe nobody noticed.”

“Quipsar,” explained Enol, pacing the living room, “there were five thousand Kanteronians in attendance, not to mention the innumerable others who were watching at home as we were broadcast live on Kanteron 6’s most-watched FV station. I’m pretty sure one of them noticed when the seven-year-old son of Enol Vaspounden, Supreme Ruler nominee, uttered the word that has been voted the most offensive word in the entire language by The Kanteron 6 Society for Deciding which Words Are Bad every single year since the society was originally founded by Lesvun Foral, five hundred and thirty-seven years ago.”

“They could have all been distracted at that moment ...”

“No,” said Enol, “they were not all distracted at that moment.”

“The Kanteron 6 Society for Deciding which Words Are Bad could have decided that it was maybe not so bad, after all, and we just haven’t heard about it, yet.”

“Of course not. They’re notoriously stubborn about these things.”

Quipsar reasoned, “Maybe they’re not, anymore ...”

“They are.”

“Well ...”

“Where’s that kid? I’m going to phenol his phenol until he’s phenoled.”



Once Dernkid had been sufficiently phenoled, Enol called an emergency public address. Then, he remembered that he had to be elected before he could call emergency public addresses, so he would have to call a regular address whenever the public felt like having him address them, preferably in an emergency-like manner. Luckily for him, the public was very keen to hear what he had to say regarding his son’s rather interesting vocabulary. Thus, waiting was kept to a minimum. Planning for the regular, plain, old, non-emergency address had been difficult, but, now, Enol thought that he might actually be able to turn the situation to his advantage.

“Ladies ... Gentlemen ... Kanteronians of non-standard gender. There is a pestilence upon our planet. That pestilence is dirty words. For those of you unfamiliar with the concept, dirty words are words of a dirty nature, which ought not be spoken aloud, especially by children.

“But our children are speaking them. Even my own family is not immune. It has come to my attention—as well as the attentions of several others—that my own son has been heard to utter the dirtiest of dirty words.

“Who is to blame, here? Surely, someone must be at fault. We cannot blame Dernkid, for he understands not what he has done. He is young, innocent, and cute. We can clearly not blame me, for obvious reasons that only the most dimwitted of Kanteronians would need explained to them. No, something else is to blame, here. Dernkid is but the victim. He is the victim of a dangerous tool which threatens the minds of all our children. You all know of this tool. You have one in your own homes. Yes, even you. I speak, of course, of your FV.

“There is but one thing we can do to stop this menace. We must pass a lot of laws that will horrifically compromise the ‘Say What You Want’ clause of the Kanteron 6 Constitution, which many learned people consider to be one of the most important foundations of Kanteronian freedom.”

Thus, the cuckoo group was formed. Had he known that on the distant planet Earth, in addition to being a word used to describe total

loonies, a cuckoo was also a peculiar bird with the annoying habit of laying its eggs in the nests of other birds, leaving the unsuspecting parents-to-be the task of raising its children, he might have opted for a different name. As it is, though, history is, as they say, history, a fact which is so blazingly obvious that the author probably needn't point it out.

Originally, the cuckoos weren't a political group. They were just a bunch of people who latched onto Enol's message for one reason or another. They held a few rallies and signed a few petitions. After a couple of weeks, they elected to become a full-fledged group, at which time Enol chose the name "cuckoos," which he felt would make a nice, family-friendly, non-aviary-sounding name.



"The cuckoo group. Do they have a point, or are they just a bunch of loonies? Enkli."

"Well, certainly, I think the images viewed on FV do have a tremendous impact on our daily lives. Just last week, for example, I saw an FV ad for a local restaurant. Later that very same day, I went out to eat. Sure, you could probably chalk it up to coincidence—or maybe even metabolism—but I think there's obviously some sort of vast conspiracy going on, here."

"Yartle."

"Vasphouden is still a dope. He has no control over his own family and chooses to cover up his child's unruliness by blaming it on FV programs. This 'group' is really nothing more than a club for bad parents. They should all be ground into bathroom manufacturing materials."

"Wespi, what do you think of the ads?"

"Er ... I don't know ... I threw out my FV after hearing Vasphouden's speech ..."





## **Chapter 18**

### **The Quest for Knowledge, the Importance of Friendship, and the Obligatory Playground Scene**

Dernkid's previous father had never seemed to worry very much about schooling. Hiblie had been quite content to simply let Dernkid learn about life at his own pace through the act of sitting under the kitchen counter and sticking little bits of tape to his body. This, however, was not acceptable for the son of a politician. The world had to see that Enol showed concern over his child's education. Also, sending Dernkid to school meant that there would be less time that his parents would actually have to pay attention to him. This was why Dernkid now found himself standing in the front of a large classroom.

In Ms. Frinklebarry's class, it was customary for new students to get up in front of the other kids in order to tell them a little bit about their lives and embarrass the heck out of themselves. "Class, today we have a new student. New student, why don't you tell the class a little bit about yourself?"

Dernkid examined an unusual hair on the back of his hand.

"New student ..."

What was unusual about this particular hair was that it looked so much like all of the other hairs on the back of Dernkid's hand that it stood out.

“New student, introduce yourself.”

Dernkid wondered how it was possible for something to look so much like everything else that it looked different. After a bit of wondering, he decided that this didn’t make a particular lot of sense, so he ripped the hair right out of his hand and opted to forget about it, completely.

“New student, please pay attention.”

Dernkid noticed another unusually usual hair on his hand.

Ms. Frinklebarry lightly drove her heel into Dernkid’s foot to get his attention. “New student, tell the class who you are.”

Dernkid said, “Dernkid.”

Ms. Frinklebarry prodded Dernkid to go on. “Please go on,” she said.

Apparently, she wanted him to tell them something else. Dernkid considered this. He could always tell them “phenol,” but, the last time he’d done that, it hadn’t appeared to be greatly appreciated. Perhaps he could tell them his last name. He was pretty sure he had one, though he wasn’t entirely certain what it was.

An impatient Ms. Frinklebarry suggested, “Tell us about your parents. What do they do?”

Dernkid thought about it, then answered, “Daddy tells people what he thinks they want to hear so they will write his name down on a piece of paper, and Mommy spends his money on four-armed flazers.”

“Hmm ...”

“Last night, Daddy was covered in marshmallow juice when he tried to play his new campaign ad in the video player.”

“Ah.” Ms. Frinklebarry was pleasantly surprised to find that something Dernkid said very nearly made some kind of sense to her. Naturally, she gravitated towards this so as not to appear dumber than her students. “Campaign ads? So, your Daddy is a politician, is he?”

“He’s a cuckoo,” explained Dernkid.

“Hmm ... Yes ...”

Of course, it wouldn’t do for Ms. Frinklebarry to say that she had no idea what a cuckoo was or why Dernkid would choose to refer to his father as one at this moment in time, as it would require admitting that her students knew about something she didn’t. Luckily for her, though, one of the other students was equally unknowledgeable. “What’s a cuckoo?”

Ms. Frinklebarry looked at Dernkid and asked, “Why don’t you tell the rest of the class what a cuckoo is?”

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He considered the question but could think of no reason to not tell the class, so, instead, he answered, "It's a nice, family-friendly, non-aviary-sounding name."

An unenlightened Ms. Frinklebarry simply said, "Oh ..."

"At least that's what my Daddy says," continued Dernkid, "but it's really an Earth bird that lays its eggs in other birds' nests, so it doesn't have to raise its own children."

"Er ..."

Dernkid looked around. "A little like this, actually."

Ms. Frinklebarry decided that this would be an excellent time to say, "That's nice, Dernkid. Now, why don't you go find a seat?"

He considered the question but, again, could think of no reason to not find a seat so, instead, embarked upon a quest to locate one. Finding the seat turned out to be extraordinarily easy, as there were quite a lot of them in the classroom. Unfortunately, most of them happened to be occupied, which made sitting in them extremely difficult, a fact Dernkid quickly discovered after receiving only three bruises. He then decided that it would be much better for him to find an empty seat, which was nearly as easy as locating an occupied one and resulted in a great deal less physical discomfort.

When he was properly seated, Dernkid proceeded to listen to Ms. Frinklebarry talking about addition and subtraction. He ceased listening when he realized that it was all much too boring. He started to wish he had that interesting hair back on his hand, again.

After a few minutes, the hand of another student extended towards Dernkid and placed a folded piece of paper in front of him. Dernkid unfolded the paper, revealing a message that had presumably been put there for him to read. It said, "Hay, new Kib. your sToopid." Dernkid examined the message for a few seconds. Then, he lifted his pencil and began to write on the piece of paper. When he was done, he passed the corrected, much more grammatically accurate note back in the direction from which it had come. Hopefully, its recipient would be grateful for the help.

Ms. Frinklebarry talked to her students about Kanteronian history. She made sure to point out that the important thing was just to memorize the dates and not to worry too much about an event's historical significance.

The note-wielding hand made a reappearance, leaving a second piece of paper on Dernkid's desk. This one read, "you Think your smarT."

your a dummy.” Again, Dernkid gave the student a hand with his lackluster communication skills.

Ms. Frinklebarry stressed the importance of following directions and thinking “inside the box.”

Dernkid wondered if he should get a box to think inside of. Perhaps the kitchen counter would work just as well.

Ms. Frinklebarry told her students about how the most important thing in life was friendship. She then proceeded to explain that the best way of finding friendship was by fitting in and being just like everybody else.

Dernkid’s third piece of paper simply said, “YOU FENOL.” Presumably, its author had finally decided to give up on the capitalization problems, completely.



Dernkid wandered about the playground. This was his first experience with recess. The concept was fairly simple: Recess was a small portion of the day set aside so that the children could be happy for ten minutes. Actually, it didn’t quite work this way, though. It mostly acted to allow half of the students to be mean to the other half of the students for ten minutes.

As Dernkid looked around, he noticed three green-shirted boys walking in his direction, coming to introduce themselves to the new kid.

“Hi, new kid,” said one of the green-shirted children. “What’s your name?”

“Dernkid,” answered Dernkid.

The green-shirted kid on the left said, “I’m Mibby.”

The green-shirted kid on the right said, “My name’s Mibby.”

The green-shirted kid in the middle said, “Hi, I’m Mibby.”

Mibby said, “My parents named me after the boy in ‘Daddy Knows What to Do.’”

Mibby said, “My parents are big fans of ‘Lakki.’”

Mibby said, “My parents named me Mibby because everybody else was naming their kids Mibby.”

Mibby asked, “So, is your name not Mibby, then?”

“No,” answered Dernkid.

Mibby said, “Tough break.”

Mibby asked, “So, where’s your green shirt?”

Mibby asked, “Is your green shirt at the cleaners?”

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Mibby said, "Green shirts are nifty."

Mibby said, "Everybody wears green shirts."

Mibby said, "People who don't wear green shirts are dummies."

Mibby asked, "Are you a dummy?"

Dernkid failed to grasp the line of reasoning which explained how a piece of fabric's failure to reflect red and blue light waves could possibly have an adverse effect on its wearer's IQ.

One of the Mibbys, who apparently did, said, "You are a dummy, aren't you?"

At this point, the three of them walked off, explaining to everyone they passed, in great detail, just how much of a dummy the new kid was.

Dernkid took this opportunity to ponder the pendulous nature of the swing set.



## **Chapter 19**

### **Scandal**

Enol was in the living room watching FV when he heard the news. “Enol, honey, we’re out of milk.”

He was in the kitchen, putting milk in the refrigerator, when he heard the other news. “Enol ... Enol, come here!”

He walked into the living room, where Quipsar was sitting in the chair, wearing her new orange glazer, which she’d made him buy for her because it was slightly oranger than her other orange glazer. Her eyes were pointed towards the FV, which appeared to be showing a special news bulletin that had just interrupted the station’s regularly-scheduled programming. He wasn’t sure why Quipsar would call him in here to see a special news bulletin. He wasn’t even sure why she would want to watch a special news bulletin. Special news bulletins weren’t nearly as interesting as sitcoms. Sitcoms were nifty. There was a possibility that she’d called him to look at her new glazer again, but she’d already done that three times already, and three was her usual limit on the number of times she requested for Enol to view her glazers. Perhaps if he actually listened to what was being said on the special news bulletin, he might find himself somewhat illuminated.

“... taking you live, to the conference, already in progress.”

The FV then cut to a conference, which was attended by reporters,

journalists, and other people typically seen at conferences important enough for their own special news bulletins. Standing on the stage in front of them all was Kilo Jopset and some other guy. Kilo Jopset picked up a microphone to address the conference and the FV viewers at home, whose favorite shows he had just interrupted. Suddenly, Enol found himself hoping that it was time for the “Slomac” reruns to come on so that Kilo Jopset would be interrupting his stupid self.

“Mr. Ertin,” Kilo Jopset said to the other guy, “would I be right in saying that you’ve met my opponent in the upcoming election, Enol Vasphouden?”

The man, identified by the text on the FV screen as Mosley Ertin, adjusted his spectacles to a more comfortable position on his nose and nodded. “Yes.”

Enol thought there was something very, very familiar about this Mr. Ertin. He looked like ...

“On this occasion,” asked Kilo Jopset, “what did Vasphouden do?”

He looked almost like ...

“He spilled trash on the floor, and he wouldn’t pick it up.”

The janitor ... Enol responded, “Oh, crud ...”

“So,” continued Kilo Jopset, “he just dumped a bunch of smelly trash—for no reason, whatsoever—all over the nice, clean floor that you’d worked so hard at maintaining, and he callously refused to pick it up, just choosing to walk away and leave you to fix his mess? Is that right?”

“Yeah,” said the janitor. “Pretty much.”

“You put me in a garbage bag!” pointed out Enol.

“Honey, he can’t hear you,” explained Quipsar.

“That’s no excuse!”

Just then, the telephone<sup>1</sup> rang. It was Gasper. He sounded worried. “Enol ... Are you watching FV?”

“Yeah ... I just found out.”

“I can’t believe it,” disbelieved Gasper. “I mean this ... Why this? Why now?”

Enol found that the worry in Gasper’s voice made him worry, so he tried to make it go away. “It’s okay. It’ll be alright. We’ll figure something out by election day.”

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<sup>1</sup> A Kanteronian communications device, named after its Kanteronian inventor, Alexander Graham Telephone. This incredible coincidence may well be of some significance, but no one has ever really cared enough to find out.



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Gaspar choked on a tear, which is incredibly hard to do, seeing as how tears are, generally speaking, much, much smaller than the human windpipe. After performing the Heimlich maneuver<sup>1</sup> on himself, he said, "But ... I mean ... Election Day? Will that be soon enough?"

"Well ..." Enol pondered the question, found it confused him, and decided to give up pondering and just start talking. "Yeah ... I mean ... Why wouldn't it be?"

Gaspar, who was nearly equally confused but not quite, said, "Oh, I don't know ... It's just ... How could they do this?"

"I know, I know," said Enol. "It's all very shocking."

"I can't believe they interrupted 'Slomac!'"

"Er ... What?"

"Slomac was just about to rescue little Mibby from the evil crime lord!"

Enol asked, "Gaspar, did you even listen to the special news bulletin?"

"Well ... No," admitted Gaspar. "I turned my FV to the fishing channel, instead. They never interrupt that for anything."

"I think maybe you should check it out. Kilo Jopset is having a very interesting discussion with a janitor from The Kanteron 6 Center for Government, Law, and Telling People What to Do."

"Janitor? I don't think I've seen that episode."

Gaspar changed the channel on his FV, leaving a pause in the conversation that lasted approximately the same length of time that it took Kilo Jopset to ask any environmentalists who might be watching whether they really wanted to vote for a guy who liked to go around throwing trash all over the ground, willy-nilly. At the end of this pause, Gaspar asked, "Enol ... how could you?"

"I didn't. I ..."

"You made me miss 'Slomac.'"

"Shut up," demanded Enol. "You've got to help me get out of this."

"Me? Hey, it's not my fault you like to litter."

"I don't like to litter," insisted Enol.

"You've got a weird way of showing it," observed Gaspar.

Enol tried to argue, realized he couldn't, and said, "Forget it. Just find a way to get me out of this, or else."

There was a pause. Then, Gaspar asked, "Or else what?"

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<sup>1</sup> A Kanteronian life-saving technique named after Kanteronian scientist Alexander Graham Heimlich.

J. N. White

“Er ... I don’t know,” admitted Enol. “I was kind of hoping that your brain would insert something really bad and unpleasant there ...”

“Ah ...”

“Not doing it, huh?”

“Nope.”

“And, do you think it’s going to continue to not do it?”

“Yep.”

“Ah ...”

## Chapter 20

### Interview with the Reporter

Enol sat in Thought. Why he'd chosen to name his chair Thought, he wasn't quite sure, but he'd gone ahead and done it, anyway. Perhaps he'd simply hoped that sitting in pieces of furniture with intellectual-sounding names might help to give him the edge that he needed to think his way out of this latest bad thing that needed to be thought out of. So far, it didn't seem to be working especially well. In all fairness to Thought, though, this might not be entirely the fault of the chair. After all, it was kind of hard for him to think when he kept being distracted by that bit of dirt in the corner. Enol supposed he could easily clean up the bit of dirt, but it was probably better just to leave it rather than risk not having an excuse to justify his lack of non-sit-in-able thought.

After a while, Enol decided that Thought was beginning to feel a tad uncomfortable. He decided to remedy this by changing the chair's name to Henry. Unfortunately, this did extremely little to help the situation.



Meanwhile, Gasper sat on Enol. After learning of Enol's foolish janitorial scandal, he'd named one of his seat cushions Enol, specifically for the purpose of sitting on. He thought that, when he found himself sitting on a bar stool, he would probably also name it Enol. While he was at it,

he should probably go ahead and name both of his socks Enol, as well. It was always best to be on the safe side, after all.



Franvy Yensin's car was known simply as car. Had he known about the inanimate-object-naming fad that was currently going on in at least two other Kanteronian households, he likely would have come up with something a bit more inventive, but, as it was, the vehicle simply remained car.

It was a fairly normal car, in most respects. It had four wheels. It had four doors. It had a fuel-injected stereo system. The most unusual aspect of the car was the trunk, which was used primarily for drinking water and eating peanuts. There weren't really a lot of reasons for a car to drink water or eat peanuts, but Franvy was a tad eccentric and had insisted that his car be equipped with a trunk.

Franvy's old car had been more interesting. It had flown. It was kind of a sad story. For generations, Kanteronians had dreamed of a future in which everyone would drive flying cars. They watched movies with flying cars. They read books with flying cars. They even dropped cars out of spaceships just to see if they'd learned how to fly, yet. For years, scientists, engineers, and auto mechanics slaved away, hoping to make the dream a reality. Then, finally, after innumerable hours of hard work, it happened. The price of jet fuel suddenly dropped to the point at which the average Kanteronian could easily afford it. The flying car was now a practical and affordable possibility. It was wonderful. Finally, the flying car had become a reality.

Aside from the unsightly wings which protruded from the doors, the flying car looked almost exactly the way everyone had always imagined it. It was beautiful. Auto dealerships immediately began replacing their stock with new, flying stock. Older models were fitted with wings and rocket engines so as not to become obsolete in the brave, new world of aeronautic traffic jams.

As time went on, however, the problems with the flying car became more and more apparent. Flying, it turned out, was quite a bit more difficult than driving. There were attempts to fix this. The government began to offer free pilot-training classes to anyone with a driver's license. Unfortunately, the average Kanteronian had trouble grasping even the simplest of aeronautic concepts, like yaw, pitch, and drag. Attempts at teaching them how to bank led to the inadvertent destruction of several

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Kanteronian money storage facilities.

The final straw came when an elderly lady with a shaky grasp on the differences between flying and hovering attempted to stop at a red light. The unparalleled 3,423,897,205-car pile-up was single-handedly responsible for the bankruptcy of 68% of all Kanteronian auto insurance companies and the creation of Kanteron 6's third largest mountain, Car Peak. Soon after, flying cars were banned, and those remaining were confiscated from their owners.

Now, though, Franvy Yensin drove his regular, old, non-flying car down the street. Franvy missed his flying car. He missed the feel of the sky, the thrill of flight, the "Kra-BOOM" of the motorist who had gotten his fuel gauge confused with his altimeter. The addition of the trunk didn't quite make up for the lack of wings, but it was a start, at least.

None of that was important, though. What was important, right now, were the camera and microphone lying in the passenger seat. They were important ... Very, very important ... Or maybe just very important ... No, no ... They were definitely very, very important. They were very, very important because Franvy Yensin was a reporter. Not only that, he was a reporter who had managed to get hold of Enol Vasphounden's home address.



There was a knock at the door. Enol politely asked who the hell it was. There was another knock at the door. Enol reluctantly got out of Mervin, as his chair was now called, and walked to the door, which thus far remained anonymous. When he opened it, he was greeted by the sight of some weirdo with a video camera and a microphone.

"Er ..."

"Hello, Mr. Vasphounden. How are you today?"

"Um ... Very confused ..."

"Oh, excellent," said the weirdo. "This will be even better than I thought."

Enol scratched his head. "Er ..."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Let me introduce myself. My name is Franvy Yensin. I'm a reporter, and I'm here to give you an interview."

Enol said, "No, thank you. I've already got one," and slammed the door. That should take care of that.

There was a knock at the door. Enol walked across the room and sat in Mervin. There was another knock. Then, he heard a voice coming

from the other side of the door, a bit muffled but intentionally loud enough for him to make out exactly what was being said. "Well, viewers, it looks as if Enol Vaspounden has chosen not to give us his side of the story. What is he afraid of? What sort of terrible secret is he trying to hide? Perhaps we'll never know."

"Crud," murmured Enol, who then walked back across the room and opened the door. "I'm sorry," he told the reporter, "I thought you said, 'splinter stew.'"

"You already have a splinter stew?" asked Franvy.

Enol considered the question and answered, "Well ... It was a gift, you know ..."

"Ah, yes, of course. But, more to the point, I think what Kanteron 6 would really like to hear about is what you have to say regarding this latest scandal."

That was probably true. Enol thought about several possible replies before deciding to stall for time, instead. "Is it customary to give interviews in apartment hallways?"

"Er ... Well ... I ..."

"Why don't you come inside and have a seat?"

"Oh ... Thank you," said Franvy, who then entered the apartment, where Enol was chagrined to find that he chose to sit in Mervin. That meant Enol would have to sit in the uncomfortable, metal folding chair he'd bought so that Quipsar would have a place to sit, too.

"How would you like a nice, hot cup of frompe?" asked Enol.

Franvy, who had already stopped at seven different frompe shops on the drive over, nodded rigorously. "Oh, yes, please."

Luckily, Enol didn't happen to have any frompe ready, so, while Franvy set up his camera, he bounded off to the kitchen to brew the slowest kettle of frompe he'd ever brewed in his life. In fact, it was one of the slowest kettles ever brewed by any Kanteronian. The slowest Kanteronian frompe brewer ever was Oskar Empduc, who stubbornly insisted that frompe should always be brewed at room temperature, and even he would have been impressed by the lack of speed with which Enol brewed this latest kettle.

Since he was in the kitchen, Enol decided to have a chat with Dernkid. "Hi, son."

"Hello, Daddy."

Noticing the tall stack of papers on the table, Enol asked, "What are you doing?"

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“Homework,” answered Dernkid.

“Ah ... Yes.” There was a moment of silence, then Enol said, “Dernkid, could I ask you a question?”

Considering that a question had just been asked, Dernkid decided that the answer was obviously, “Yes.”

“Dernkid,” said Enol, “if you spilled some trash on the floor, and you were running for public office, and a guy with a microphone came to your door, and you were making him a cup of frompe, what would you do?”

Dernkid wondered if this was another one of those FV-inspired bonding things. “I’d make a coconut satellite to call Lakki to come fix the hole in the boat, so we could get off the island and have Slomac tell Daddy what to do.” That should do it.

Enol considered this. After a bit, he said, “But we don’t have any coconuts.”

Dernkid shrugged and went back to his homework.

“Thanks, kid,” Enol said sarcastically.

“You’re welcome,” Dernkid said equally sarcastically.

Finally, the frompe finished brewing, signaling that it was time for Enol to leave the kitchen and face the reporter.

Back in the living room, Enol handed a cup to Franvy, who took a sip and said, “Mmm ... That’s one darn fine cup of frompe. Now ... Where were we?”

This, Enol thought as he sat down in the hard, metal chair, would be his big chance. “I think you were about to ask me what the capital of Quesular 9 is.”

Franvy thought for a moment, then shook his head. “No, I’m pretty sure I was planning to ask you about the littering.”

Crud. “Well,” explained Enol very slowly, “that was all really just one big misunderstanding ...”

“Uh-huh,” said the reporter. “Would you care to expand on that?”

“You see,” Enol attempted to expand, “I was unaware that I had spilled the trash on the floor.” He started to give himself a pat on the back but decided it might look a little suspicious.

“Hmm ... Yes, but did Mr. Ertin not draw your attention to this fact?”

Enol started to consider the question before answering but decided he didn’t have time for that so attempted to consider it and answer at the same time. “Perhaps ... But, you see, I have this problem with my

eardrums. I can't hear sound frequencies between 533 and 566 MHz. Apparently, the frequency with which the janitor chose to respond at that time was contained somewhere within that range. Had I been able to hear him, I would, of course, have taken the time to clean up after myself." Then, as an afterthought, he added, "I hate litter. I think the environment is nifty."

“Oh ... So you’re an environmentalist, then?”

Enol thought about this and said, “Yeah, sure.”

[illegible]

“Um ... Of course,” lied Enol.

“And you take your own cloth bag to the grocery store instead of using the paper ones which require the destruction of trees?”

“Absolutely,” said Enol, who realized that he was now going to have to buy himself a nice cloth bag.

“And you buy the artificial, smoke-free fires instead of starting your own?”

“I wouldn’t even know how to start my own fire if I wanted to.” Enol thought he was handling this nicely.

“And your wife?” asked Franvy. “Is she as environmentally-conscious as you?”

At that moment, the door swung open, Quipsar stepped in, and she said, “Enol, look at my new glazer! It’s made entirely from the kidneys of endangered alkdoes!” Then, noticing that her husband had company, she added, “Oh ... Hi.”

Enol turned back to the reporter and said, "I'm working on that."



## **Chapter 21**

### **We'll Return You to Your Unbelievably Captivating Story Right After this Brief Public Service Announcement**

Historically speaking, there were always a lot of animals on Kanteron 6. This was all well and good. The animals, for the most part, tended to prance about and mind their own business. Very few times did they actually go out of their way to annoy the Kanteronians.

Then, one day, someone decided it would be a nifty idea to try eating some of the animals. A lot of Kanteronians quickly came to the conclusion that many of the animals tasted pretty swell. More importantly, they tasted a heck of a lot better than the grass and leaves the Kanteronians used to eat. This wasn't so bad, though, because people only killed enough animals to feed their families. Soon, however, some Kanteronians decided that the act of killing animals, in itself, was pretty fun, so they went ahead and did it even when they had much more food than they actually really needed.

This led to the problem of what to do with all of the dead animals. Someone came up with the bright idea of hanging their heads in the living room. This wasn't a completely satisfactory solution, however, as living rooms soon started to become cluttered with dead animal heads. What was worse, though, was that this only used the heads. Something still had to be done with the rest of the bodies.

This was when all of Kanteron 6 was struck with one of the greatest fashion brainstorm of all time. "Hey!" they said. "Why not *wear* the animals?" Many people agreed that this was a really neat-o idea. All of Kanteron 6 looked sufficiently glamorous in their stilk-paw gloves, bambel-head helmets, and vool-fur undergarments.

Unfortunately, there weren't enough dead animals available for everyone to wear. Thus, there had to be an increase in the number that were killed. To make matters worse, the animals people most wanted to wear invariably turned out to be the ones with the least number of specimens in existence. This made the acquisition of proper attire quite difficult. People were willing to pay increasingly large sums of money for these dead animals. This, of course, meant that other people became increasingly enthusiastic about making them dead. This led to an unusual turn of events. Some people began to assume that, just because an animal was endangered, it therefore must make an extremely desirable outfit.

One of the saddest stories related to this phenomenon is that of the ignoble alkdoo. The problem here sprung from the fact that, for the alkdoo, mating season only came around once every six years. Thus, there weren't really a lot of them. Apart from this, the only thing at all special about the alkdoo was its completely disgusting appearance. There was absolutely no part of the alkdoo that would, in any way, make any sort of good outfit, whatsoever. Since there were only a small number in existence, though, people assumed that there must be something about them worth wearing. Much time and effort was put into this problem, and, in the end, it was determined that the most attractive part of the alkdoo was its kidneys, which had a brownish-green color that was slightly less putrid than the brownish-green which covered the rest of its body.

Clothes made of alkdoo kidneys immediately became a hot commodity. Clothing manufacturers began to order alkdoo kidneys by the dozen. Unfortunately, as there were only a dozen alkdooes left, this practice ended relatively quickly.

There was still hope for the alkdoo, though. Ever-expanding technology during the last fifty years had brought about great advancements in the field of genetic engineering. Research was begun, and, after six long years, scientists had finally managed to create an actual, living, genetically-engineered alkdoo. This alkdoo was then immediately sold to a clothing manufacturer for an undisclosed sum of money. Now, every six years, a new alkdoo is successfully created, and its kidneys are immediately auctioned off to the highest bidder.

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Clothes made of alldoe kidneys now retail for approximately the same price as a small city. Some people took this coincidence to indicate that small cities would also make fabulous clothes, but the outfits proved to be extremely bulky and hard to move about in, thus bringing their foray into the world of fashion design to a disappointing end.



## **Chapter 22**

### **Disobedience and Detention**

Dernkid sat in his room. Technically, it wasn't really his room. It was the kitchen. The problem was that Enol's apartment had come equipped with only a single bedroom. Enol's solution had been to simply replace the tablecloth with a bed-sheet. He ate most of his meals in front of the FV, anyway.

In many ways, this was a convenient arrangement for Dernkid. Should he become hungry or thirsty at any time, he had only a short distance to travel to the refrigerator. Another bonus was the close proximity of the kitchen counter, which could prove to be quite advantageous should he ever choose to make a return to the exciting world of tape-sticking.

The downside of this, though, was that people were constantly making sandwiches on his bed. At first, this wasn't so bad. He would roll over at night and be pleasantly surprised when his mouth happened to land on a klapdong stain. The bits of hilonia that lie hidden about his sleeping area were, on the other hand, quite disgusting. Especially the really old ones.

There was also a problem of storage. Dernkid's attempts to use the oven as a closet for his wardrobe were quite disastrous and extremely annoying for local firefighters. His efforts to convert the dishwasher into

a receptacle for containing the various interestingly-shaped clods of dirt that he collected did not meet with any greater amount of success.

Right now, though, Dernkid was not concerned with the nutritional aspects of his bed-sheet or the number of fires he'd started. For the moment, he was mostly concerned with his first-ever homework assignment. Up until now, Dernkid had always assumed that home and work were two separate things, but apparently he had been mistaken about this. For this particular assignment, he had been instructed to take a bunch of numbers and add them to a bunch of other numbers. After doing so, he was then to take some other numbers and subtract them from a different, fourth set of numbers. After a few minutes of this, Dernkid became bored and decided, instead, to prove that addition and subtraction were really the same thing.

To aid him, Dernkid developed the concept of "negative" numbers, which extended to infinity below zero. Dernkid was quite fascinated by the fact that these "negative" numbers existed outside of the range of things naturally perceived by humans. In fact, it was this idea that piqued his interest in the concept of multiple dimensions.



Ms. Frinklebarry flipped through the papers on her desk. She flipped through them, again. Then, she flipped through them a third time. After her fourth flipping, she was quite disappointed to find that she was still one flipping paper short. That meant that she would have to actually look through the papers to see whose was missing rather than just using the little, red stamp to show her approval. It took her a few minutes to figure out whose paper wasn't there because it was a name she wasn't yet accustomed to seeing. When she had figured it out, she said, "Dernkid, could you come up here, please?"

Dernkid stood up and walked towards Ms. Frinklebarry's desk, at which point Ms. Frinklebarry informed him, "Dernkid, I don't have your homework."

This was true.

"Dernkid," said Ms. Frinklebarry, "why don't I have your homework?"

He considered the question, then answered, "I didn't give it to you."

"Yes, obviously, I know that. Why didn't you give it to me?"

"I'm not finished."

"Not finished?" asked Ms. Frinklebarry. "Did you add the numbers

to the other numbers?”

Dernkid nodded.

“Did you subtract the other numbers from the different, fourth set of numbers?”

Dernkid nodded.

“Then what on Kanteron 6 haven’t you done, yet?”

“Fully develop the concept of time as the fourth dimension.”

“Oh ...” Ms. Frinklebarry considered this. Obviously, it wouldn’t do for her to admit that she had absolutely no idea what Dernkid was talking about, so, instead, she said, “You have detention. See me after class.”

Dernkid turned and walked back to his desk, wondering just what a detention was, how he’d gotten one without noticing, and why this required him to see Ms. Frinklebarry after class. Back at his seat, Dernkid worked on the problem of devising a satisfactory method of representing four-dimensional space on a two-dimensional sheet of paper.

At the front of the classroom, Ms. Frinklebarry discussed, in great detail, the subtleties of carrying the one.



Detention was, it seemed, meant to act as some form of punishment. The student who had done the bad thing was to remain after school to ensure that justice was served. Thus, Dernkid was forced to spend an hour in the school library, which was really much more fun and exciting than his kitchen at home.

Dernkid explored the bookshelves, rummaging through book after book, searching for something that would catch his attention. He ended up stumbling onto a book that seemed to compliment his own research quite nicely. It was called *The Fifth Dimension* and had been written by a Kanteronian author named Alexander Graham Fifthdimension. It was a collection of theories on the fifth dimension and included descriptions of various experiments which Alexander Graham Fifthdimension had performed in an attempt to enter the fifth dimension and finally get away from his annoying relatives once and for all.

In addition to the subject matter, Dernkid was also quite fascinated by the texture of the book’s paper. What he didn’t know was that, for several years after The Great Shortage of ‘63, many Kanteronian authors had insisted that all of their works be published on sandpaper. He was also quite unaware of the fact that this practice had ended shortly after The Great Sandpaper Shortage of the First Week of June ‘72.

At the moment, though, Dernkid wasn't especially concerned with that. He just sat and ...

"Heh, heh, heh."

He sat and read the ...

"Heh-heh, heh."

Distracted, Dernkid stopped reading the book, looked up, and began to search for the source of the offending noise. He soon discovered that he was not alone. Sitting a few feet away was a wild-eyed boy with slightly unkempt hair.

"Heh-heh. You're new, here."

Dernkid nodded.

"Whatcha in for? Huh?"

"Detention."

The boy nodded his head. "Me, too. Heh. Whadja do, though?"

Dernkid considered this. He couldn't seem to recall doing anything really in particular, so he answered, "Nothing."

"Wow," the other boy said. "They can put you in for that, now, huh? They're gettin' strict. Heh."

A few seconds of silence followed. When the boy realized that his company wasn't going to ask what he had done, he volunteered the information, himself. "Me, I was in class. I'm in fourth grade, see. Heh. The teacher, see, she says, 'Not another peep outta you kids, now.'" The boy paused for a moment, then went on, "I said, 'Peep,' see. Get it? Heh, heh-heh, heh. So, I'm in here."

Dernkid thought this boy seemed to be a bit odd. But, then, most people seemed that way to him.

"What's yer name?"

"Dernkid."

"Weird name. Mine's Mibby, but most people call me by my nickname," said the boy. "'That Stupid Kid Over There.' That's what they call me. Heh-heh. Sometimes, they just say 'Stupid' for short, y'know."

Dernkid attempted to go back to his reading, but Stupid continued to make conversation. "I gotta bust out of here. Can't take it, anymore. Got any ideas?"

Dernkid had an idea that he'd rather be reading but didn't think Stupid would find it to be especially useful.

"I tried diggin' out, one time, heh. Teacher was all like, 'Nobody say a word, or else.'" He paused, taking a moment to scratch the side of his nose. "So, I said, 'Word.' Heh, heh. Get it? I said word. Anyway, I got



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detention, an' I tried to dig out. Got about three feet. Didn't have a shovel. Man, my fingers were sore after that."

Dernkid focused his attention squarely on his book.

"Teacher caught me, though. Gave me detention, again, for messin' up the floor. I got two feet further, that time. I coulda made it, then. 'Cept I didn't, y'know. Heh-heh-heh. Doctor had to look at my fingers. I couldn't hold a pencil for two weeks after that."

Dernkid continued trying to read.

Stupid went on, "Then, this one time, teacher has a stapler on the desk. She says, 'Nobody touch this stapler,' an' stuff. So I put my finger on it, an' I'm like, 'Touch-touch, touch-touch.' Teacher says I'm givin' her a headache, see. She says to stop it. So, I threw the stapler at her head. Get it? Heh. She got to ride in an ambulance. She gave me detention, so I thought maybe I could just run through the wall. I woulda made it, 'cept I didn't, again. That's why my nose is crooked."

Dernkid's eyes remained on the book, though it was a bit hard to concentrate.

"It would be good if there was some kinda way to go through the wall or around it or something." Stupid's eyes began wandering over the room. "There's gotta be a way outta this joint, man. I know it. There's just gotta, heh-heh."

Dernkid looked up. "There's a door."

Stupid's head spun around towards the door. "Oh, yeah. Thanks, man." Then, he stood up, walked out of the room, and closed the door behind him.

That solved that problem.



The door opened, and a woman stepped in. "Mibby, your mother is here to ..."

Dernkid, the room's lone occupant, turned towards her.

"Aw, crud," she said. "Not again."



## **Chapter 23**

### **Environmentalism, Vegetarianism, and Consumerism**

Food Crater was one of the largest grocery store chains on Kanteron 6. The name Food Crater was derived from the fact that the original store had actually been located inside of a real crater. It all started when everyone on the planet turned their FVs off simultaneously, prompted by a special appearance of the Supreme Ruler which interrupted all of their favorite FV shows. This left a satellite floating there in space, full of signals but with no one to send them to. This caused an information overload, which led to a short circuit, which led to a long circuit, which caused the satellite to stop orbiting the planet and start crashing into it, instead.

Half of the resulting crater was contained in Yamsa Zechu's backyard. Yamsa's son, Ispler Zechu, was a budding, young entrepreneur who wisely realized that there were people on the planet who might like to see the crater. Thus, he managed to convince his father not to have the hole filled in so that he could charge admission. Unfortunately, since a portion of the crater was located on public property, most people simply chose to go see that half, instead.

That was when Ispler was struck with the brainstorm that would eventually lead to his enormously successful business life. He went down to the local Food Bog and bought a bunch of cookies. Then, back at

home, he set up a cookie stand on his dad's half of the crater. He called it the Cookie Crater, and, from there, he sold his repackaged "Crater-Cookies" at extraordinarily inflated prices.

As business continued to improve, Ispler branched out into other types of consumables and renamed his stand the Food Crater. At first, he found it difficult to start opening new stores, as it was impossible to make the satellites crash with the necessary precision, but he soon realized that it would be much easier for him to just use a shovel.

Meanwhile, however, The Association of Kanteron 6 FV Stations was stuck with the problem of how to keep satellites from crashing every time the Supreme Ruler came on. Many possible ways of doing so had been proposed, but the ultimate solution, arrived at after several months of discussion, had been the creation of a brand, new fishing channel, which was never interrupted for anything.

Now, entirely oblivious to the history surrounding its name, Enol and Quipsar walked into the local Food Crater, looking to do some shopping. After a quick stop at the small frompe shop located at the front of the store, the two of them began their great, consumeristic excursion. The problem they were faced with was that they were now supposed to be adamantly opposed to the eating of animals. One of the most important things Enol learned during his first week as an environmentalist was that when animals eat each other it's all a part of the beautiful circle of nature. When people, on the other hand, eat animals, it's a cruel and barbaric practice—no matter how tasty the animals in question might be.

The biggest problem with this is that animals are, indeed, yummy. Even vegetarians are quite aware of this fact. For this reason, a number of companies have been set up to construct pseudo-meat. This basically amounts to a mound of crushed, ground-up, mixed together vegetables, which are intended to duplicate the look, taste, and texture of real dead animals. For the most part, their attempts have been fairly unsuccessful, owing to the fact that vegetables—even when ground up into a sticky, green pulp—taste absolutely nothing like animals. To complicate matters further, the only way anyone can say, with any degree of certainty, that a mound of crushed, ground-up, mixed together vegetables tastes at all like a dead animal is to actually have a taste of the dead animal, itself, which these people are, of course, adamantly opposed to doing.

What most people are quite unaware of is the fact that vegetables, themselves, are quite adamantly opposed to vegetarianism. In fact, vegetables have long hoped that someone might take it upon themselves

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to mold a chunk of dead crogter into the shape of a piece of broccoli. In all likelihood, the dead crogter would bear little resemblance to real broccoli, but, at the very least, it certainly would taste a lot nicer. Due to their lack of eyes, mouths, and central nervous systems, however, vegetables have always had a great deal of trouble letting everyone know just how they feel.

Perhaps all of these problems would go away if only people realized that renguls—a species of large, succulent creatures—were actually quite fond of being eaten and even wished that people would choose to eat them more often. Unfortunately, rengul vocal cords have not yet developed to the point at which they can convey their wishes to the Kanteronians, who have yet to understand why these meaty animals are seen hanging around outside of abattoirs and fast food restaurants all the time.

Oblivious to most of this, Enol and Quipsar continued their journey, wandering down aisle after aisle in search of anything that bore the phrase “Okay for Vegetarians!” In reality, nothing bore this phrase, but, being relatively new to vegetarianism, they didn’t know that. Despite this handicap, however, their shopping cart slowly accumulated a collection of products they were relatively sure had no dead animals in them. Finally, the two of them reached the end of the last aisle and proceeded to the cash registers at the front of the store, content with their shopping cart full of disgusting, meatless products.

At the register, Enol and Quipsar stood in line as a noticeably apathetic teenager shoved people’s groceries across a price scanner and into a bag. The teenager’s name was Ulvar Lelo, and the only pleasure she got from her job—apart from the unimaginably small paycheck—was the pleasure that came from stacking the heavy groceries on the top of the bag, which crushed the lighter groceries at the bottom and really irritated the customers.

When Enol and Quipsar reached the front of the line, Ulvar asked, as apathetically as she could, “Paper bag or plastic bag?”

“No thank you,” said Enol, motioning towards the cloth container slung over his shoulder, “I have my own.”

Since the register required the removal of a bag before a purchase could be completed, Ulvar apathetically removed one of the plastic ones and made sure to apathetically toss it into the trash receptacle rather than the plastic-recycling one. She then proceeded to run the groceries over the scanner and apathetically stack the heavy vegetables on top of the easily crushed ones. As it happens, though, this did not irritate Enol quite

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so much as she might have hoped it would, due to the fact that he was fairly certain the vegetables would taste pretty horrid, no matter how crushed they were.

## **Chapter 24**

### **The Chain of Life**

At the weekly cuckoo group meeting, Enol walked onto the stage and stood behind the podium; a position he was becoming increasingly used to of late. He used to wonder why it was necessary for public speakers to have a block of wood sitting onstage when addressing their audiences. After a few speeches, though, he decided that it was probably necessary to stand behind something in case the speech-giver got a stiffy from picturing the audience naked.

With this particular speech, Enol's primary goal was that of informing his fellow cuckoos that they were all environmentalists. He thought a direct approach might work best. "Ladies ... Gentlemen ... Cuckoos of nonstandard gender ... You're all environmentalists."

He was wrong.

"I'm not."

"Me either."

"I hate the environment."

This called for a slightly more subtle course of action. "You have to be environmentalists. After all, you all love your children, don't you?"

The crowd considered the question.

Enol pointed out, "You must love your children. That's why we started this group—to protect the children we love from the dangers of

naughty FV shows.”

“Yeah!” agreed the audience.

“Down with FV!”

“Except for ‘Buds!’”

“Right,” said Enol, “so we all love our children. Now, what’s even more important to our children than sensible FV programming?”

“More sensible FV programming?”

“Clean underwear?”

“A duck?”

“A long distance phone plan that works for me?”

Enol shook his head. “No, no, no. The environment.”

The audience gave him a look to indicate that this wasn’t quite sinking in. Someone raised his hand, then realized that no one else was raising theirs so put it back down again. Someone else saw him raising his hand so raised hers, too, only to drop it upon realizing that the rest of the crowd didn’t appear to be joining in.

“Okay, you see,” explained Enol, “what we do now affects the future of Kanteron 6. Our children will have to live in the future, so, if we throw all of our trash up in the trees, then our children will have to grow up in a world with trash-filled trees. Understand?”

Everyone nodded hesitantly.

“So, therefore,” continued Enol, “we have to protect the environment for the sake of our children.”

People nodded ever-so-slightly less hesitantly.

“That makes us all environmentalists. See?”

There was a bit of silence as the crowd mulled over this logic for a bit. Finally, they came to the conclusion that this all sounded hunky-dory and went out to hug some trees.



Pawdet Fambradahambadablar’s family had immigrated from Julitan 4 twenty years ago. Back on their home planet, Pawdet’s family name had been Fambralar, but there had been a terrible mistake in the Kanteron 6 Immigration Offices due to his father’s rather unfortunate stutter.

One of the hardest things in the universe is learning to fit in on a new planet. Luckily for the Fambradahambadablar family, the Julitanians are quite similar to the Kanteronians in most respects. The only real, noticeable difference is the Julitanian third arm, which Pawdet had surgically removed so as not to look stupid wearing a flazer.



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Now, twenty years later, Pawdet was a hardworking officer of The Kanteron 6 Center for Law Enforcement and Oppression. It was a pretty good job. Pawdet didn't much care for the actual work, but at least the pay was mediocre. His primary job duties involved distributing tickets to improperly parked vehicles and then doing three hours of paperwork for each fourteen-dollar fine. Perhaps if there were only some sort of fourteen-dollar bill with which to pay these fines, Pawdet's job might have been much easier. Then, he might only have to do two and a half hours of paperwork for each one.

On this particular night, Pawdet was making his appointed rounds through the park when he happened to notice twenty people chained to one of the non-mechanical trees. He decided that he should probably go and check it out, what with him being a police officer and all.

He carefully approached the group and instigated a conversation by introducing himself. "Good evening, everyone, my name is Officer Fambradahambadablar ... So ... Um ... What's all this, then?"

"It's a demonstration!"

"Ah, okay," said Pawdet, "a demonstration. Jolly good. So what, exactly, are you people demonstrating?"

"We're protecting the rights of this tree!"

Pawdet asked, "Protecting its rights from whom?"

"From the evil, corporate evil-doers!"

"From people who throw trash out of their car windows!"

"From unsuitable FV programming!"

None of this made any amount of sense to Pawdet, who indicated his inability to catch a ride on the proper train of thought with a look of utter confusion.

"You can't make us leave!"

"Heck, no! We won't go! Heck, no! We won't go!"

Pawdet attempted to point out, "I'm not trying to make you go."

"We'll not let anyone cut down this tree!"

"But," reasoned Pawdet, "this tree isn't being cut down."

"And we're going to make sure that this tree continues to be not being cut down!"

"It's not even so much a tree as a sapling," observed Pawdet.

"We're going to make sure that this sapling continues to be not being cut down!"

The proper train of thought seemed to have departed early and was now halfway to its destination.

Pawdet motioned towards the surrounding area. "What about all of those other trees?"

"Well, we only had the one chain, you know ..."

"Yes, I see," said Pawdet, "but what made you choose to chain yourselves to the smallest tree in a thirty-mile radius?"

"It's kind of a short chain ..."

The proper train of thought had obviously derailed somewhere en route, and its surviving passengers were now struggling to pull themselves out of the twisted wreckage, whilst the families of the victims organized their respective lawsuits against the railway company.

Completely baffled, Pawdet asked, "How did you even manage to get twenty people chained to one sapling? It's not big enough. Look at it. It's being crushed under your weight! You've killed the poor thing!"

"It's not dead. It's just resting."

"Resting!?" persisted Pawdet. "You've broken its trunk in half!"

"Don't listen to him! He wants to make us go, so he can cut down the tree when we aren't looking!"

For all practical intents and purposes, it appeared to Pawdet that the tree had already been cut down. For lack of something better to say, he pointed out, "You're all a bunch of bloody cuckoos."

"Yes, we are!"

"Fair enough." Pawdet considered this for a bit. "I don't suppose you'd have room on that chain for one more?"

## **Chapter 25**

### **Death of an Alkdoo**

Quipsar looked at her alkdoo kidney glazer abjectly. She would, of course, now have to get rid of it. It was a pity, really. It had cost Enol a large sum of money, but they were environmentalists now, so it wouldn't exactly do to have her seen about wearing alkdoo kidneys, no matter how glamorous they would make people assume she must look.

The official story, here, was that Quipsar had found the alkdoo kidney glazer in a store and—in surprise, anger, disgust, and possibly a few other emotions—had brought it home to show to Enol so that they could stop those responsible. The press seemed to like this story well enough—particularly the reporter, Franvy Yensin, who was so impressed by the couple's dedication to the environment that he even volunteered his services to the Vaspounden campaign—but it was not entirely without its problems. First of all, there was the fact that the glazer had actually been purchased from Gasper. The second was what to do with the glazer now that it could no longer be worn. After all, it would be much too callous to simply throw away something that a living creature had died to create and too immoral to sell it to someone else. Luckily, however, Enol and Gasper were able to come up with a plan they thought would work nicely.



“Hello, everyone, I’m Franvy Yensin, official reporter for Enol Vasp-hounden and the cuckoo group. I’m here today, live at this solemn occasion, bringing you the only news coverage actually endorsed by the cuckoos. We are, of course, here today to witness the funeral of the alldoe kidney glazer which was discovered by Quipsar Vasp-hounden in an undisclosed clothing store somewhere on Kanteron 6. We have Mrs. Vasp-hounden here with us, now. Good evening,<sup>1</sup> Quipsar.”

“Good evening, Franvy.”

“Now, Quipsar, you’ve refrained from revealing just where it was that you found the offending garment. Would you care to explain why to the home viewers?”

“Certainly,” said Quipsar, trying not to sound like she was reading from cue cards. “Enol and I both feel that it’s much more important to go after the people who are actually responsible for producing the glazer. We have, however, given the store a very stern warning to not sell anymore alldoe kidney glazers, whatsoever.”

Franvy, an expert in not sounding like he was reading from cue cards, asked, “Do you have any leads on who might be responsible?”

“Well,” read Quipsar, “we haven’t positively identified the source, yet, but we have been working very closely with the store, local police, and some people we met on the street. We think we’re getting close, but, of course, we don’t want to go into too many details, just yet.”

“Of course. Thank you for your time, Quipsar. I’m sure everyone watching at home wishes you the best of luck in tracking down these villains.”

Franvy then turned back to the camera and continued, “Also here with us, today, is Gasper Nandelhuck—clothing designer, marketing advisor to the Vasp-hounden campaign, and inventor of the glazer. How are you, Gasper?”

“I’m good.”

“Now, Gasper, I understand that you aren’t responsible for this particular glazer.”

Gasper thought about it for a moment. “No, I’m not.” After another moment, he realized there was more on the cue card. “It’s a bootleg glazer. It was made without my authorization.”

“And what legal actions are you planning to take in regards to this?”

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<sup>1</sup> Funerals are normally held in the afternoon, but more people watch FV in the evening.

asked Franvy.

Gaspar explained, “Kanteronian inventorship laws are quite clear on this point. The inventor—that’s me—retains all rights to his invention—that’s the glazer. You see, when a person buys a glazer, they don’t buy the actual glazer. They buy a license which permits them to wear that particular glazer. This license does not extend to any other glazers. It also does not give the person the right to sell, lend, or in any other way redistribute said glazer. Most importantly, it does not give a person the right to make their own glazers. Hence, anyone caught sewing, selling, or letting their friends borrow a glazer is punishable under the inventorship laws and required to pay damages to me, the inventor. Thus, it is my right—nay, my duty—to find these criminals and take their money away.”

“I think most of our viewers would agree with you, there,” said Franvy. Then, turning back to the camera, he said, “The procession seems to be getting underway, now, so we’ll be taking our live coverage graveside.”

In addition to twelve cameramen, the funeral was attended by Gaspar, Franvy, the Vaspounden family, and several members of the cuckoo group. Originally, Enol had wanted twenty cameramen so as to ensure that the home viewers would always be guaranteed the best possible view of the funerary action. Since the whole thing had been arranged on somewhat short notice, though, Franvy had only managed to gather twelve. Luckily, however, these twelve cameramen had all been trained in music videos, so the funeral footage was all very exciting, with lots of zooming and other unnecessary camera movements.

The most difficult aspect of the planning had been locating a priest. There were lots of priests on Kanteron 6, but there were also lots of different people with lots of different religions. In order to avoid alienating any of these people—who, for all Enol knew, might be potential voters—it had been necessary to hire a priest who would be very vague and ambiguous. Thus, he might belong to any religion the FV viewer saw fit to assign to him. Eventually, Enol had just dressed the local barber up in a robe and a funny hat. The barber’s voice, however, was unfortunately un-priest-like, but, as luck would have it, the butcher down the street had a very holy-sounding voice, so Enol had just recorded it. It was this voice that now emanated from the speakers, as the barber moved his lips silently and the twelve cameramen tried not to focus on his mouth too much.

“Oh, noble alldoe,” the barber didn’t say, “who led a good and moral life for the five minutes before the removal of your kidneys, we are

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here, tonight, to praise and honor you in the name of whatever deity the FV viewer wishes you to be praised and honored in. We commit your remains, or rather those of your kidneys, to the ground, where they will, over time, undergo an unpleasant metamorphosis that we choose not to go into detail on. May your eternal spirit rest in everlasting peace and harmony, whilst your remains do that other nasty stuff. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, etc., etc. ...”

## **Chapter 26**

### **Sport**

Enol and Gasper came to the conclusion that Kilo Jopset's next move would be to make an appearance at a major sporting event. What made them come to this conclusion was never really made clear. Kilo Jopset's next move had, in fact, been to make an appearance at the florist's on the corner, but the Vaspounden campaign team remained blissfully unaware of this fact. However, given their knowledge, no matter how inaccurate it might have been, they decided that Enol should make an appearance at a major sporting event first.

As it turned out, Franvy's cousin, Pethux Yensin, was an announcer at the Kanteron 6 Crogters' faseball stadium. Thus, they were able to pull a few strings to allow Enol to make an appearance at the game against the Garvindow 2 Lussers. See, there is an old Kanteronian custom that, at important faseball games, someone of great importance is to throw the first pitch. Hence, sports stadiums are constantly looking for great artists, politicians, and FV stars to make the first throw, which is a bit odd as these sorts of people are, generally speaking, not very good at faseball. Certainly, at least, not as good as the professional faseball player who gets paid millions of dollars a year for throwing faseballs. Actually, this probably explains why all subsequent pitches are normally made by the team's usual thrower and not the someone of great importance, although once,

in a game against the Delbory 10 Krumphets, the Crogters had decided that having the someone of great importance—in this case, sculptor Pimwy Dolger—play an entire game would be a good strategy to confuse the other team. It was thought that the presence of a well-respected artist might “psyche-out” the other players. To this day, Pimwy Dolger still holds the league’s records for most head injuries caused and received in a single game.

The someone of great importance at the Lusser game, Enol Vasp-houden, was therefore scheduled to throw only the one pitch. Enol made his approach to the thrower’s mound; gripped the small, spherical object in his hand; and prepared to unleash his legendary quickball, which had struck out so many of his fellow classmates back in grade school all those years ago. Unfortunately, once the ball had left his hand, it became abundantly clear that the only person who might ever conceivably mistake the ball as being quick was, in fact, a grade school student. He was also rather disappointed to find that his aim had not at all improved over the years. The faseball, which could only be described as slow, went on to bean three audience members in the head. In all fairness to Enol, however, the last two weren’t really his fault. The first person to be beaned decided to get revenge. Unfortunately, as he attempted to do so, it became abundantly clear that his aim was just as bad as Enol’s. The second person to be beaned attempted to see that justice was served, so he tried to send the ball back at the first person, but, as it happens, his aim was even worse, owing partially to the fact that he’d just been beaned in the head at close range. Consequently, his throw saw justice served on a completely innocent bystander. The third victim’s aim was so bad that the ball flew in not only the wrong direction but the wrong dimension as well.

Somewhere in the dimensional continuum, a father told his son that balls did *not* appear out of thin air and that he should apologize to the nice fortuneteller for breaking out her window.

Luckily for Enol, The Kanteron Faseball League had been prepared for this all-too-frequent possibility. Instead of showing the actual throw, the giant viewscreen—which very nearly gave attendees the same sensation as watching the game on their FVs at home—cut to stock footage of a much better throw with Enol’s face digitally pasted over the face of the professional thrower.

After his measly attempt at a throw, Enol went back to his seat, where he, Dernkid, and Quipsar watched the giant viewscreen, listened to



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loud music, saw scantily-clad women doing stunts that would presumably help their team to score more points than the other one, and witnessed extraordinarily expensive pyrotechnic devices flying into the air at regular intervals for no discernible reason whatsoever. A strange thing about sporting events in this part of the galaxy was how much went on at the event apart from the actual sport. It's almost as if someone, at some point, realized that the sport, itself, was really not all that interesting, after all, and decided to throw in a lot of gratuitous fireworks and half-nude ladies in an attempt to convince audience members that they were really having a good time. In fact, some of the more liberal planets in the galaxy were even beginning to phase out the actual sport altogether, as it seemed to detract from the other forms of entertainment. At these games, the teams themselves would just make a brief appearance near the end, where the winner would be determined by a rousing bout of rock, paper, cutting mechanism.

Now, back at his seat, Enol attempted to explain the sport to Dernkid, who was somewhat confused by the game's lack of windows. "Fase-ball is Kanteron 6's favorite pastime," explained Enol, who had obviously forgotten about consuming alcohol, having sex but not babies, watching FV, sleeping, drinking frompe, shopping, talking, napping, shopping for frompe, eating, watching frompe FV commercials, saying nice things to other Kanteronians, bathing, driving, saying bad things about other Kanteronians when they aren't around, gambling, and knitting. "It was invented on Kanteron 6 by a famous Kanteronian," Enol went on, clearly unaware that the game had actually been based on the older Quesularian game of wickbat.

Not really understanding what was going on eight hundred yards below, Dernkid asked, "What are they doing?"

"Well," said Enol, "when the Lussers' thrower throws the ball, the Crogters' player has to hit it and run around in a circle back to where he started while the players from the other team try to catch the ball and hit him with it."

"Why does that man do weird things with his hands?"

"That's the coach," explained Enol. "He's devised a complex series of hand gestures to let his team know what they should do next."

Dernkid asked, "Why does that player wear all black?"

"That's not a player. That's the referee. He knows all of the rules, and he makes sure nobody does anything wrong."

"What are the fireworks for?"

“They ... Er ... They commemorate ... Or ... That is, they symbolize ... Um ...” Enol realized that he actually had no idea what the fireworks were for. There was, therefore, only one way of handling the situation. “Just stop asking stupid questions and watch the game.”



Jay checked his watch. The game had been on for nearly fifteen minutes. That meant it was almost halftime. Jay took this opportunity to practice his dance moves. He was a member of Demboyso, one of the most popular bands on Kanteron 6, this week. At birth, his parents had bestowed upon him the name of Pletno Cheezwix, which he'd recently had legally changed to Jay—just Jay—in order to better embody his onstage persona.

Before the creation of Demboyso, much time and energy had gone into researching how to build the ultimate band. A great deal of money had been spent to find out what types of instruments the band should play, what sorts of songs the band should write, and how the band members should sing them. Eventually, after much wasted time and effort, it was decided that none of this really mattered, after all. The ultimate band, the music executives declared, would consist of five extraordinarily hunky guys with phenomenal dance moves. So, after a grueling thirty minutes of auditions, Repa Vardis, leader of the project, finally chose the five hunkiest guys he could find and signed them all up for dance classes. However, the problem remained that neither of these hunky guys could play an instrument, read music, write music, or sing. Originally, Repa had planned to hire real musicians who could play the band's instruments, write the band's songs, and sing the band's lyrics. After a bit of thought, though, he decided that none of these things were worth the amount of money that would have to be spent on them. His solution was to take an old Wagens song and add a few electronic bleeps here and there so that it might legally be called a new song. Then, for each “new” Demboyso song, the electronic bleeps were simply rearranged ever-so-slightly.

Now, Jay was backstage—with fellow Demboyso members Ray, Clay, Trey, and Rupert—preparing for tonight's big show by practicing the choreography, which everyone knew was the important part. In fact, it was the only part they knew or even really had anything to do with, though how much they actually had to do with that was fairly questionable.

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This show should turn out to be a memorable, if surprising, one. Rupert, who was the bad boy of the band, was going to cut the tag off of a mattress right in front of everybody. Then, Ray, the sensitive one, was scheduled to spontaneously declare, "I'm so sensitive." Later on, Clay, the hunkiest one, was going to unfasten the top button on his glazer.

Ray carefully adjusted the sound balance on his microphone, which was actually rather silly as he wouldn't really be singing anything into it. It was best to be on the safe side, though.

"Hey, Clay."

"Yes, Trey?"

"One of your sequins is a tad dusty."

"So it is. Thanks, Trey."

"No problem, Clay."

Clearly, the inter-band rivalry was quite out of control.



"Well, here we are, nearing halftime, and what a memorable show it's been."

"You're absolutely right, Trindel," announced Pethux, "the players have been in top form, and, I must say, the pyrotechnics are some of the best I've seen in my entire career."

"We have a special treat for our audience, tonight," announced Trindel, "as hot, new music sensation, Demboyso, prepares for their three-hour halftime concert."

"Yes, you heard correctly, folks. That's three hours. The Kanteron Faseball League has finally done away with their antiquated two-and-a-half-hour halftime restrictions. Naturally, a couple of innings had to be removed to accommodate, but I think you'll all agree that it was well worth it."

Down on the grass, a right-fielder lied down and took a nap just to see if anyone would notice. Dernkid did but refrained from saying anything as it might possibly have been construed as a stupid question.

Then, the buzzer rang, signaling the end of the inning and the beginning of halftime. The players left the field, and Demboyso walked onto it. Unfortunately, no one noticed, as they'd all chosen this moment to go to the bathroom. Many of the audience members were fairly keen to see the halftime concert but were prevented, what with the three-hour line to use the restroom and all.



## **Chapter 27**

### **The Obligatory Bar Scene and a Bit about Cabbies or Something**

Kilo Jopset lived at the top of Kilo Jopset Tower, on the very peak of Kilo Jopset Mountain, right in the center of Kilo-Jopsetville. Clearly, he was pretty well off.

Today, he was going for a drink at The Kilo Jopset Bar. He knew the way well. He drove his Kilo-Jopsetmobile down Kilo Jopset Avenue and took a right onto Kilo Jopset Street. From there, it was just a short drive past Kilo Jopset Boulevard and Kilo Jopset Lane. The Kilo Jopset Bar was there, nestled snugly between The Kilo Jopset Pharmacy and The Kilo Jopset Pornographic Emporium.

Kilo Jopset stepped out of the Kilo-Jopsetmobile and into the bar, where he was greeted by the bartender. “Good afternoon, Kilo Jopset. What can I do for you?”

“I’ll have a Slomac shooter.”

“Ah, yes. Excellent choice, Kilo Jopset.” The bartender prepared the appropriate beverage and served it to his patron. “So, how are things?”

“Not bad, I suppose,” said Kilo Jopset, taking a sip of his Slomac shooter, “aside from the obvious.”

“The obvious, Kilo Jopset?”

This slightly exasperated Kilo Jopset, who was of the opinion that

everyone should automatically know what he was talking about at all times. “The Supreme Ruler campaign. That bloody Vasphouden phenol. This election should have been no contest, but then he comes along with his ... whatever it is that makes some people want to vote for him instead of me.”

“Have you,” asked the bartender, ignoring the other customers, who were nowhere nearly as important as Kilo Jopset, “tried crushing him like a bug?”

“Yes, yes, of course. A bug, an aluminum can, a flompdird, bubble wrap ... I thought surely I’d got him with that janitor scandal, but no. Now, he’s an environmentalist. How am I supposed to compete with that? Everyone knows hippos hate the environment.”

“If all of the other hippos jumped off of Car Peak, would you do it, too?”

“Well, of course,” said Kilo Jopset. “I’d have to.”

“Ah.” The bartender suddenly found himself wondering why he couldn’t just give advice to men whose girlfriends have recently left them, like other bartenders.

“The hippos have very strict rules regarding these things,” continued Kilo Jopset, “though, technically speaking, the mass suicide is meant to take place on Kanteron 6’s *second* largest mountain.”

The bartender—who was apparently not important enough for the author to give him a name—thought back to his weeks in bartender school. What had they taught him to say in advice class? Oh, yes. It was, “Forget Vasphouden. There are plenty of other fish in the sea.”

“Er ... Yes ... But none of the fish are running for Supreme Ruler, you see ...”

“Get on with your life,” continued the bartender. “Go out. Have a good time. Show her that you’re better off without her.”

“I really don’t see how that will help,” said Kilo Jopset.

“Well,” reasoned the bartender, “it sure beats jumping off of Car Peak, anyway.”

“But I’m not going to jump off of Car Peak ...”

“You’ve made a wise decision, Kilo Jopset.” The bartender wiped absentmindedly at a stain on the bar for lack of something better to do. As an afterthought, he added, “Can I get you something else to drink?”

“Um ... No,” said Kilo Jopset. “I think I’ll try the other bar across the street.”

The Other Kilo Jopset Bar across the street proved equally useless.

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Due to the amazing similarities in the two conversations, Kilo Jopset was starting to think that maybe bartenders' advice was just memorized from a book in some sort of bartenders' advice class.

As a last resort, Kilo Jopset hailed a cab. He sat down inside, and the driver asked, "Where to, Kilo Jopset?"

"Nowhere in particular. Just drive around a bit."

"Ah. So did the bartenders give you lousy advice, then?"

Kilo Jopset sighed. "I don't even know why I bother with them, anymore."

"Let me guess," guessed the cab driver. "You're looking for advice regarding your opponent in the upcoming Supreme Ruler election?"

"You got it."

"I'm going to assume," assumed the cabbie, "that you've already tried crushing him like a bug."

"Of course," replied Kilo Jopset.

"Hitting below the belt?"

"He doesn't wear one."

"Ah ..." The taxi driver considered the facts and said, "Well, you could try setting a trap for him."

"A trap, eh?"

"Sure," said the cabbie. "A friend of mine sets them all the time. He just sticks a piece of cheese on there, and ... BAM! Those mice don't know what hit 'em."





## **Chapter 28**

### **Oblivion**

Oblivious to ... Well ... Most things, really ... Enol continued on with his life, much the same as always. That meant lots of FV. The current fad on FV shows was something called “real FV.” The concept was fairly simple. These shows consisted solely of real people doing real things. The trend had started with shows that allowed real people to answer real questions and win loads of real money. After that came the shows where real people were placed in contrived social settings so that cameras could capture their pseudo-real social interaction. A string of shows was created, each one realer than the last. This all culminated in a show called “Bob.” “Bob” was a “real FV” program about a guy named Bob who sat at home all day watching “real FV” programming. The ratings were, naturally, enormous; especially for the special live episode where Bob watched his own show for several hours.

As a matter of fact, it was while he was watching this episode that Enol was struck with his latest brainstorm. He’d thought up a great, new method of spreading his ideas among the people/publicity stunt. He picked up the phone and called Franvy.

“Franvy, hi, it’s Enol.”

“Hi, Enol. What can I do for you?”

“Franvy, I’ve got a great idea that I think you might be able to help

me with.”

“What is it?”

“I,” said Enol, “want to start my own ‘real FV’ show.”

Franvy was intrigued, a fact he conveyed by saying, “Oh ... I’m intrigued.” He continued with, “What do you want me to do?”

“Well, you know more about FV than I do. You’ve worked at FV stations, with FV people. I was hoping maybe you could tell me what I need to do.”

“Sure. Let me make a couple of phone calls, and I’ll get back to you. I think maybe I can get the ball rolling on this.”

“Excellent,” said Enol.



“Mwa-ha-ha-ha-ha,” said Kilo Jopset. He was laughing maniacally because he had just listened to the tape of Vasphounden’s phone conversation with his official reporter.

Generally speaking, the law is against political candidates putting taps on the phones of their rivals, but most political candidates tend to treat the law book as more of a suggestion book. Of course, the law book has fairly stringent laws against doing this as well, but that isn’t a problem as political candidates usually just choose to ignore those particular suggestions.

“Carlto! Come here.”

Carlto was, of course, Kilo Jopset’s own, personal, half-man, half-groblek perversion of science. He was an unfortunate byproduct of the hippos’ failed attempts at creating a man-sized, talking groblek for selling their t-shirts. Originally, he was to be incinerated along with the other failures, but Kilo Jopset had saved him, thinking that it would be nice to finally have someone to fetch his slippers for a change.

The hunched figure of Carlto slowly emerged from the small, wooden groblek house in the corner. He limped unsteadily across the room to his master, his tail dragging lifelessly on the floor behind him. A string of saliva dripped from his quivering lips and slowly stretched towards the floor as Carlto opened his mouth to say, “Res, Raster?”

“Carlto,” said Kilo Jopset, “why don’t you go and fetch my slippers?”

Good. Carlto liked the easy questions. The harder ones made his head hurt. “Recause roo don’t ravv any.”

“Ah ... Good point. In that case, prepare the Kilo-Jopsetmobile. I have things I must attend to.”



The Slomac theme song blared from the speakers of the Kilo-Jopsetmobile as it roared along the highways of Kilo-Jopsetville. The roaring came not from the vehicle's speed, which was well within the acceptable legal limits, but from a special set of pipes that Kilo Jopset had installed to increase the noise factor and give a greater sense of occasion to his impending arrival.

Upon reaching his destination, the Kilo-Jopsetmobile skidded to a halt. Skidding to a halt was, of course, much more impressive than simply slowing down and stopping, which was why Kilo Jopset had ordered the creation of a special braking system that would cause his vehicle to always skid to a halt.

When the skidding had come to an end, Kilo Jopset stepped out of the Kilo-Jopsetmobile and walked into the building's entrance. Inside, he made his way purposefully towards the back, where there was a wall of small boxes. Kilo Jopset took a few minutes to examine these boxes. When he had located one to his liking, he took it back to the front of the building, where a man slid the box over a scanner, causing the readout to display, "SLIPPERS - \$7.99."

Kilo Jopset counted out the appropriate amount of money, handed it over to the cashier, and drove back to Kilo Jopset Tower to have Carlto fetch his new slippers.



## **Chapter 29**

**I Don't Know Why That Last Chapter Was Called "Oblivion," Really ... From now on, I'll Try to Make Sure That All of the Chapters Have Really Descriptive Titles That Actually Have Something to Do with the Chapter They're Describing, Just Like This One, which Is About ... That Is, It Has ... I Mean ... Oh, Bloody Hell ...**

The first episode of "Enoll" was filmed with two months left until the election. It began with a brief announcement by Enol to the extent that the show had been created to educate the home viewer about the Kanteronian political system and give them a chance to see the inner workings of a real Supreme Ruler campaign in action. It then immediately cut to the catchy theme music.

The catchiness of this music was based on Slozenberg's Unified Music Principle. The main concept of this principle was that of how to make music catchy. It was based on the fact that Kanteronians have excruciatingly small memories. Naturally, this means that not much will fit in them. Therefore, in order for a song to be truly catchy, it must be extremely simple and repetitive. If the same three notes are played over and over again, they will inevitably become ingrained in the listener's brain, creating the illusion that the music heard was very memorable.

The lyrics of the theme song were written by Jersal Abday, a guy who knew a guy who was friends with a girl who once dated a songwriter who rearranged the electronic bleeps for Demboyso, a fact which was prominently declared in the opening credits. The lyrics, themselves, went something like this:



Enol, Enol  
A real smart guy who's seen all  
Definitely not mean-ol  
Or even a drag queen-ol  
(Not that there's anything wrong with that)



Enol, Enol  
He never threw a bean ball  
He's on your FV screen-ol  
And he is not unclean-ol  
(Not that there's anything wrong with that)



He's Enol, Enol  
Vasphouden



The show, itself, was essentially an hour-long highlight reel of the most interesting moments of Enol's day. They included his trip to the bakery, his walk through the park, and his donation of money to various charities. They did not include his breakage of the speed limit, his usage of the word "phenol" after being caught breaking the speed limit, or his punching of the elderly woman who cut line in front of him at the bakery. Enol had wisely insisted on having complete control over what actually made it into the show.



In Campaign Headquarters—aka Gasper's apartment—Enol sat in one chair and Gasper the other. These chairs happened to be even tackier than usual. In an attempt to make his upholstery magenta, Gasper had inexplicably gotten it to do flannel. After a lengthy discussion on this

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phenomenon, the two finally got around to the topic at hand.

"It's not bad," Gasper said in reference to his friend's new FV show. "It's no 'Buds,' but still ... I like it."

"I don't care."

"Ah ..."

"The Kanteronian public has to like it," said Enol, trying to keep his mind off the flannel for a moment.

"Well, they'll probably think it's pretty nifty."

"Perhaps ... But we need them to think it's niftier than 'Slomac.'"

"Hmm ... Yes," said Gasper. "That could be tricky."

"What do you suggest?"

Gasper considered things for a moment, then said, "Well, our show is newer ... Fresher ... We have that on our side. Just to be safe, though, I think we should try to pinpoint the more popular aspects of 'Slomac' and attempt to incorporate them into our show."

"Good," said Enol. "I'll call Romby and see if he can work that into the script."

"Also, I think you should have a sidekick."

"A sidekick?"

Gasper nodded. "Yeah, a sidekick. All of the great action heroes have them. Sometimes, it's just a groblek or something, but, in your case, for consistency's sake, I think it should be your Assistant Ruler candidate."

"But I haven't chosen an Assistant Ruler, yet."

"Any ideas?"

"Er ... Well," said Enol, "Gee ... I don't know ... Would you like to be an Assistant Ruler?"



"Don't make a move, Vaspounden, or the kid gets it!"

"I'll give you one last chance, Callahan! Drop the gun, or else!"

"Ha!" Callahan's laugh echoed through the deserted warehouse as his grip on the boy—whose name was Fimmy due to the fact that polls showed many Kanteronians were starting to tire of the name Mibby—tightened. "Or else what, Vaspounden?"

"Or else," said Enol, holding up a remote control device of some type, "I'll press this button and detonate the explosives in the box right behind you."

Callahan's eyes widened, and his hold on the gun loosened ever-so-slightly. "You're bluffing!"

“Am I?” asked Enol, applying pressure to the button.

Callahan re-tightened his grip on the gun. “Push that button,” he threatened, “and I’ll pull this trigger.”

“Pull that trigger,” warned Enol, “and I’ll press this button.”

Callahan stared at Enol. Enol stared at Callahan.

“Well,” said Callahan, “it seems that we can go no further.”

“It might seem that way to you,” said Enol, “but you’d seem wrong.”

As Enol’s finger pressed down on the button, Callahan screamed out, “Noooooo!!!!”

The large explosion blew both Callahan and Fimmy high into the air. Fimmy came down safely, landing softly on the big pile of feathers that happened to be sitting around in the otherwise empty warehouse, just as our hero had, no doubt, planned all along.

Callahan came down painfully, landing on the hard, concrete floor. In the process, the gun fell out of his hand and slid down a deep drain, as our hero had, no doubt, also planned all along.

To show his human side, Enol rushed to help the boy instead of going after the bad guy. Callahan took this opportunity to run out of the warehouse and jump in his car.

Enol picked up Fimmy and ran towards the door. As he did so, he lifted his arm and spoke into his wristwatch. “Gasper! Bring the car! Now!”

He got outside just in time to see Callahan’s car drive away. Enol’s own car then burst out of a nearby warehouse, where it had been sitting for some reason. The tires squealed against the pavement as it came to a stop directly in front of him. Enol put the kid in the back, making sure to buckle his safety belt. Then, he sat behind the steering wheel as Gasper slid over to the passenger seat.

“He’ll head to the pier,” said Gasper, who had presumably divined this information through some unknown means. “We’ll have to cut him off.”

“I know a shortcut,” said Enol, who then drove the car down a side road. This side road did, indeed, lead them to the pier before Callahan, who had to swerve sharply to avoid hitting them.

The chase went on for some time. Enol and Gasper did not carry firearms, as they were quite adamantly opposed to the use of violence, so they just ran Callahan’s car off a cliff, instead. As it fell, Enol and Gasper walked to the edge of the cliff to watch the explosion that occurred as the car crashed into the ground below.



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The flames reflected in Enol's eyes as he said, "Got ya', Callahan."

Then, the credits rolled.

"Enol!" was a success. It was so successful, in fact, that Enol decided to incorporate his new catchphrase into his campaign strategy. Thus, most new Vasphounden posters and FV commercials now bore the phrase "Got ya', Kanteron 6!"



## **Chapter 30**

### **Betrayal**

Romby Fansjen was one of the newest members of the Vasphouden campaign team. His specialty was script-writing, a fact that came in quite handy on “Enol!” In fact, this was why he had been hired.

Now, Romby walked into the FV studio parking garage and started towards his car, which didn’t have wings or a trunk but had cost him a rather large sum of money, nonetheless. As he began to approach his vehicle, he happened to notice a figure standing in the shadows. It appeared to be a man wearing a hat and a long coat with an upturned collar that obscured his face, making him look like one of the men Romby sometimes wrote about who stand around in the shadows of empty parking garages, waiting silently for their targets to appear. This thought made Romby stop walking. He looked around. He realized that, apart from himself and the mysterious gentleman in question, this parking lot did, in fact, appear to be quite empty. Okay ... What were the possibilities, here?

One. The man could be an informant waiting around to give Romby special information that he needed to resolve the plot. Romby considered this. He couldn’t think of any kind of special information that he might need. Besides, he was pretty sure that, if his life was involved in any kind of plot whatsoever, he probably wasn’t the main character.

Two. The man could be a hired assassin who was patiently waiting for Romby to walk by so he could murder him. There were probably a few people who might like to see Romby dead, but his life didn't really seem like that kind of a story. It was more of a lighthearted comedy. Or maybe a satirical science fiction tale. Murder was, however, still a slight possibility.

Three. The man was here to make Romby some type of offer. This offer would likely be made under threat of death, which wasn't quite so bad as actually being killed but was maybe not the most pleasant way one might choose to spend one's time. This seemed like a pretty good possibility. Romby would most likely be the peripheral character who was persuaded to perform some action which would really screw things up for the story's protagonist.

Four. The man was just waiting for someone else. This *never* happened, so Romby could quickly rule that one out.

Romby cautiously made his way towards the betrenchcoated fellow and said, "Hi there. How's things?" He thought it would probably be best to be extra-special polite to the gentleman, just in case he really was here to kill him, after all.

"Good evening, Mr. Fansjen," said the man. "You may call me ..."

Suddenly, Romby realized who he was talking to. "Kilo Jopset! Wow!"

"Shhh! I have a code name!" Kilo Jopset whispered in such a way as to still allow for the inclusion of exclamation points by the author.

"I don't believe it! It's Kilo Jopset! I ..."

"Stop!" Kilo Jopset shouted properly, this time; then, in a voice better suited for clandestine parking garage meetings, "As I was saying, use the code name."

"Oh ... Sorry." Romby was somewhat embarrassed. With all of the secret meetings he'd written, he should have been prepared for the existence of a code name. "What is it?"

"My code name," said Kilo Jopset, "is Bilo Bopset."

"Excuse me?"

"Bilo Bopset."

Romby gave him a disapproving look. "Bilo Bopset? That's your code name? Bilo Bopset? Tell me you're kidding."

Kilo Jopset was not fond of having other people question him. "What? What's wrong with it?"

The smirk on Romby's face made Kilo Jopset quite unhappy. "Well

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... I mean ... It's not a very good code name, now is it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well ... Come on ... Bilo Bopset? You might as well call yourself 'Not Kilo Jopset.'"

"Look," said Kilo Jopset, "if you're questioning my code-naming abilities ..."

"Why don't you just use a proper code name?" suggested Romby. "Maybe something like Shallow Esophagus or Dark Lusser or something."

"I'll have you know I spent a lot of time coming up with Bilo Bopset. I thought it was quite clever."

"Well, maybe it is," agreed Romby, "but my dictionary must be out of date because it doesn't define 'clever' as 'really incredibly stupid and dumb.'"

"Okay," Kilo Jopset warned, "look, I've had just about enough of your insults. The code name is Bilo Bopset, and that's that."

"But what about ..."

"No."

"You could ..."

"No."

Romby sighed. "Okay, fine. Suit yourself, Bilo Bopset."

"Thank you," said Kilo Jopset. "Now, if that's all settled, Mr. Fansjen, I have a little offer for you."

"I'd thought as much," said Romby. "Is it being made under threat of death?"

"Er ... Well ... Would that make you more likely to do it, do you think?"

Romby nodded. "Yeah, probably."

"Well ... Fine ... I have a little proposition for you, and ... Okay, then ... If you don't accept it, you'll die."

"I'll die?"

"You'll die."

"What kind of a threat is that?" asked Romby.

"It's a death threat."

"I know that, but ... I'll die? What? Like of natural causes or something? If I don't do what you say, the natural process of aging will continue for several years until I die of old age?"

Kilo Jopset released an annoyed exhalation of breath. "Okay ... Fine. I'll kill you."

"That's better."

"Okay, now, I want ..."

"How?"

"What?"

"How will you kill me?"

"Does it matter?"

"Well, it'd be nice to know."

"I don't know," said Kilo Jopset. "I'll ... Blow up your car or something. Happy?"

"Ha!" laughed Romby. "If you're going to blow up my car, I'll just start taking the bus."

"I'll blow up the bus, too."

"I'll take the train."

"I can blow that up, as well."

"You're not very good at this, are you?"

"What do you mean?" asked Kilo Jopset.

"I mean," answered Romby, "if you tell me how you're going to kill me, then I'll just not do whatever it is I'm supposed to be doing when I die."

"Well ... I could be bluffing," reasoned Kilo Jopset. "Maybe I want you to not take the train, so I can kill you some other way."

"Yes," said Romby, "but, even so, if you tell me you're going to blow up the train, I'll know you've got transportation on your mind, which could give me the vital clue I need to avoid an untimely death."

"Well," argued Kilo Jopset, "it doesn't matter, Mr. Fansjen ..."

"Please. Call me Romby."

"Romby ... I did not come here to have an argument about the finer points of assassination attempts ..."

"Death threats."

"What?"

"Death threats," repeated Romby. "The assassination attempt doesn't come till later."

"Well, I really don't care. The point is I just came here to make you an offer you couldn't refuse. Now, will you please just accept it?"

"Well," said Romby, "if I can't refuse it, then the answer is obviously yes, but, just to be on the safe side, I think you should probably tell me what it is, first."

"You know," said Kilo Jopset, "I'm tempted to just skip the whole thing and get right to the assassination part."

## **Chapter 31**

### **Double Betrayal**

There was a knock at the door. Enol opened it and found himself face to face with his scriptwriter. “Oh ... Hi, Romby ...”

“Hi there, Enol. Can I come in?”

“Um ... I suppose ...”

“Thanks.” Romby took a step forward, into the apartment, and said, “Nice place you’ve got here.”

“Really?”

“No.”

“Oh ...”

“I was just being polite,” admitted Romby. “Bit of a dump, really.”

Enol was beginning to wonder if Romby had just stopped by to insult his living quarters. “So ... Um ... What brings you here ... to this neck of ... my home ...”

“Well, you just get right to the point, don’t you? Aren’t you even going to offer me a cup of frompe, first? I like flavor #256, but, apparently, the shop on this street doesn’t sell it.”

“No ... They don’t. I have some in the kitchen. I could brew a kettle, if you like ...”

Romby shook his head. “No, thank you. I don’t plan on being here that long.”

“Oh ... What a shame ... I think ...”

“I’m here on business. You see, Enol, I’ve received an offer.”

“Oh, that’s nice.”

“Yesterday,” explained Romby, “I had a little meeting with Bilo ... Excuse me ... Kilo Jopset.”

“What?” asked Enol. “Is he trying to start a new FV show or something?”

“No, Enol,” answered Romby. “He offered me ten thousand dollars to appear at a live press conference and reveal to the world that Enol Vaspounden’s ‘real FV’ show isn’t really real at all.”

“What ...?”

“Oh, and he also threatened to kill me, but that’s just because I asked him to.”

“But,” argued Enol, “no ... Wait ... You can’t ...”

“Can’t let him kill me? Well, that’s very kind of you, but I don’t think he’ll go through with it. That was just garage talk. More important, though,” said Romby, “is the fact that I figure you’ll be as desperate to keep me quiet as he is to keep me ... Well ... Not quiet. Anyway, this is where we find out.”

“I ... I ... I ...”

“Kilo Jopset has opened with ten thousand dollars. I’ll close the bidding two days from now. Whoever makes the best offer will get to give me their money.”

“I ... I ...”

“You know, Enol,” said Romby, “I don’t think your mouth is supposed to hang open that far. You might want to have that looked at.”

“But ...”

“No, no, Enol, it’s for your own good. If you haven’t got your health, you haven’t got ... Well ... I don’t know ... I suppose you haven’t got your health, but I don’t think that’s how it’s supposed to go. Well, that’s not important, anyway. What I’d rather have is money. You have my phone number. I expect I’ll hear from you shortly. Good day.”

With that, Romby exited the apartment, leaving Enol alone with his thought. He was going to have to do something about this, so he attempted to convince his brain to work properly, again. After a bit of effort, he finally managed to force his brain into action. His brain only did this reluctantly and was quite unhappy about the situation. At the moment, it would much rather have been doing something else. Duty, however, called and would not take “I’m not home right now, leave a



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message” as an answer.

Thus, Enol’s brain made Enol’s hand pick up the phone and dial. It also made Enol’s mouth say, “Gasper, Romby was just here. Kilo Jopset has bribed him to tell the world that our ‘real FV’ show is actually scripted. He says he’ll do it if we can’t come up with a better offer.”

Gasper’s brain took this moment to nip off on a quick vacation. Enol’s brain was quite irritated by this, so it caused his mouth to yell, “Gasper!” into the phone, forcing Gasper’s brain to bring an abrupt end to its vacation and rush home like someone who’s just realized they’ve left the kettle on.

Gasper’s brain made his mouth say, “Okay ... Okay ... Let me think.” His brain then proceeded to think about the untimely demise of its pleasant vacation.

“Well, we have to pay him,” said Enol. “What other choice do we have?”

“Er ...” Gasper considered the question and said, “Not pay him?”

Enol pointed out, “But then everyone on Kanteron 6 will find out what big liars we are.”

“Ah, yes,” agreed Gasper, “but ... Kilo Jopset owns his own city. He’s really, really rich.”

“Crud,” swore Enol.

“Okay ... Okay ... I know. We just have to find a way to get the money.”

“Of course we have to find a way to get the bleedin’ money!”

“I know ... I know ... We can borrow the money.”

“Borrow?” said Enol.

“Yeah,” said Gasper. “We just take out a loan from the bank.”



“Hi, I’d like to take out a loan, please.”

“I need your name.”

“Enol Vasphouden.”

“Occupation?”

“Politician/FV star.”

“Intended purpose for loan?”

“Pay off some guy who’s trying to blackmail me.”

“Um ... No ...”



“Bloody banks,” said Gasper, kicking the side of the building. “I bet they’d give Kilo Jopset a loan.”

“Well, that doesn’t matter,” said Enol. “We need to find another way to get the money.”

“Okay, how much do we have in campaign contributions?”

“Not enough.”

“Savings bonds?”

“Er ... Fourteen dollars.”

“Seat cushions?”

“No.”

“And I don’t suppose you’ve inherited any large sums of money you’ve neglected to tell me about.”

“Well,” said Enol, walking away from the bank, “my Uncle Zombar did leave me his favorite pair of shoes, once.”

“Oh, really?” said Gasper, following Enol down the sidewalk. “Were they encrusted with diamonds, by any chance?”

“Regrettably, no,” answered Enol, “but there was a nail in the toe. Bit of a joker was Uncle Zombar ... Wound never did fully heal.”

“Hmm ...” Gasper stopped walking and pondered the situation. “I hesitate to say this, but I’m afraid we may find that we have no choice but to turn to methods of a less than legal nature.”

“Gasper,” said Enol, “you’re beginning to sound more and more like a real campaign advisor all the time.”

Gasper twisted this around in his head for a bit to try and figure out if it was a compliment. After a few moments, he decided that he would probably just have to settle with the fact that the answer to this most pressing question was, in all likelihood, maybe.

## **Chapter 32**

### **Kanteron Dogs**

Enol slid the black sock over his head. While it wasn't exactly the planet's most stylish accessory, it did seem to go quite well with his black shirt, black pants, black shoes, black gloves, and other black socks on his feet. In fact, the only parts of Enol's body that weren't entirely covered in black were his eyes, which peeked out through two small holes cut in his head-sock.

Gaspar was clad in similar attire, though Enol couldn't help wondering if the sock on Gaspar's head smelled any better than the one on his.

"Okay," said Gaspar, "we're going to sneak in through the bank's ventilation system."

Enol nodded. "Just like in that one episode of 'Slomac.'"

"Right, and once we're on the inside, we just look around for anything else that reminds us of old FV shows and work from there."

The two thieves-to-be then made their way around the building in a thorough search for air ducts. Finally, they managed to locate one in a side alley. Close inspection, however, revealed that the air duct was approximately big enough for them to squeeze a small shoe into. Naturally, this was quite disappointing for the both of them.

Enol kicked the wall. "Crud ... Now what?"

"Now, we look for another way in," answered Gasper. "First, though, let me put my shoe back on."

With both of Gasper's feet sufficiently protected from the elements, the two inconspicuous mask-wearers resumed their exploration of the surrounding area, extending their search criteria to include things other than air ducts. After a bit, they discovered a dumpster which didn't lead into the building, a door that might, and a sign saying, "Please do not break into this building. Thanks."

Gasper tried the door, which turned out to be quite inconveniently locked, then turned to Enol and asked, "Have you ever picked a lock, before?"

"Sure," said Enol. "One time, the lock on my apartment door broke, so I had to go down to the hardware store to pick a new one." After a slight pause, he added, "Though I really don't see what that's got to do with anything."

"Never mind," said Gasper. "Do you have anything pointy?"

"Like what?"

"I don't know ... Like anything. Maybe a screwdriver or something."

Enol began to explore his pockets. After a bit, he pulled out a crumpled-up dollar bill. "Well ... the edge is kind of pointy," he said.

"I don't think that's good enough," replied Gasper. "We need something a little stronger. Something that's made out of metal."

"Sorry, I'm fresh out of pointy, metal, lock-picking paraphernalia."

Gasper eyed the garbage receptacle unhappily. He sighed, said, "I sure hope you appreciate what I'm doing for you, Enol," and began sorting through the trash in a search for anything pointy and metallic.

"Hey, careful," insisted Enol. "Don't get any of that on the ground."

"Why on Kanteron 6 not?"

"Because it's littering."

"What do you care?"

"It's bad for the environment."

"So?"

"Okay, look," said Enol, "if I have to give up eating dead animals, I'm sure as heck not going to sit around here and let you throw trash all over the ground."

"You only had to give up eating dead animals," pointed out Gasper, "because you threw trash all over the ground, too."

"Yeah, and I'm not looking forward to giving up something even better for the same, stupid reason."

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It wasn't worth arguing, so Gasper submitted. "Okay, fine. Whatever you say. No littering." He then continued his dumpster treasure hunt, being extra-special careful to not get any dirty trash on Enol's nice, clean ground.

After some time, Gasper threw his hands up in despair. "Of all the dumpsters on Kanteron 6, I've got to go and dig through the one without any pointy, metallic-like objects in it, whatsoever!"

"Crud," agreed Enol. Then, after a bit of thought, he suggested, "What about the roof?"

"The roof?"

"Yeah," said Enol, "don't criminals sometimes go in through the roof?"

"Yeah! Good thinking," said Gasper. "Okay ... Now ... How do we get up there?"

"We could jump."

The two of them looked towards the roof, which rose some twenty feet or so into the air.

"I don't know if I can jump that high, Enol."

"Well, maybe I could throw ... Never mind ... Stupid idea, I'm afraid ..."

"What we need," said Gasper, "is a good ladder."

"Yeah, but, Gasper, where are we going to get a ladder at this time of the night in an empty alleyway between a bank and a hardware store?" Suddenly, a puzzled expression crossed Enol's face as he attempted to figure out just what it was about this statement that would make a puzzled expression cross his face. Finally, he figured it out, spun around to face the other building, and said, "Hardware store, Gasper! That's it! Hardware store!"

"Hey!" exclaimed Gasper. "They have ladders in hardware stores!"

"Yes," agreed Enol, "I was just about to make that point." Then, after a moment of silence, he added, "Okay, so ... how do we get in?"

A search of the hardware store revealed that its air ducts were just as small as the bank's and its doors were every bit as locked. Gasper looked towards the hardware store's garbage container and said, "Okay, Enol, you get dumpster duty, this time."

"No way."

"What?"

"I said, 'No way.'"

"Why not?"

"Well," reasoned Enol, "there's no need for both of us to get all gunky and nasty, is there?"

"Crud," swore Gasper. "You are such a wuss. You know that?"

Enol nodded ashamedly.

Gasper reluctantly took a deep breath and plunged into his second dumpster of the evening. After a few minutes, he stood up and declared, "Dammit, does nobody throw away pointy, metal objects, anymore?"

"Don't yell at me," said Enol. "It's not my fault."

"You know what?" said Gasper. "I think it is. You and all of your environmentalist loonies."

"Cuckoos," corrected Enol.

"Nobody throws metal in the dumpster, anymore. Oh, no, they have a completely different trashcan for that. It's too good to go with the regular trash. It has to get *recycled*. You always think about yourself, don't you? You never give a thought to other people. It's always save the planet, recycle, recycle, recycle. Well, I'll tell you something: Recycling isn't the answer to everything, you know. Now, because of you and your lousy cuckoos, with all of your dumb recycling rubbish, we can't even break into a stupid hardware store. You environmentalists make me sick."

"Well, don't hold back, Gasper," suggested Enol. "Tell me what you really think."

"I think you're a big, fat stupid-head."

"Fair enough, but you've got lousy fashion sense."

"What!? Look who's talking, Mr. 'I don't wanna invent the glazer.'"

"Glazers are stupid."

"Well," said Gasper, "everyone's wearing them. Therefore, they're fashionable. I mean, that's the very definition of the word fashionable. And I invented them. I'm a famous fashion designer, now. I should be working on some fabulous new type of shoestring, not digging through garbage cans because of your FV-show-faking self."

"This is beside the point," said Enol. "We need to get into the building."

"Right ... Okay ... Sorry ..." Gasper pondered the situation. "Hmm ... If I were a hardware store, how would I let people break inside me to steal a ladder?"

Enol said, "You know, we shouldn't steal the ladder, Gasper."

"Huh ...?"

"I'm not comfortable with stealing a ladder."

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“What’s that got to do with anything?”

“I think we should leave the money for the ladder in the register.”

“Why ...? What ...?”

“Because stealing is wrong,” pointed out Enol. “We should definitely pay for the ladder.”

“But,” argued Gasper, “we’re already planning to steal as many millions of dollars as we can get in the bank.”

“Yeah, I know. We can pay for the ladder out of that.”

“Enol, you do understand that, when compared to a million dollars, a ... How much do ladders cost, anyway? Thirty? Forty bucks?”

“Don’t ask me. I’ve never needed to buy a ladder, before.”

“Well,” said Gasper, “it doesn’t matter. The point is that, when compared to what we’re planning to take from the bank, the cost of a ladder really isn’t all that much.”

“I know,” replied Enol. “That means we can more than afford to pay for it.”

“You’re an idiot,” accused Gasper.

“Excuse me for having a conscience.”

“You’re going to steal a million dollars!”

“Yeah, so stealing a ladder, too, would be overkill,” reasoned Enol.

“Good grief, this is pointless, isn’t it? We can’t even get at the stupid ladders because we can’t find a phenoling, pointy, metal thing.”

There was a period of silence as the two of them considered why one could never find a pointy, metal object when one needed it. Finally, Enol broke the silence by saying, “We could try the roof.”

Gasper reminded him, “We can’t get to the roof without a ladder.”

“And we can’t get a ladder until we get into the hardware store.”

“Right.”

“Which is why we need to get to the roof.”

“Yes ... Er ... I think so.”

Enol and Gasper carefully pondered this logic, trying to figure out if it made any kind of sense at all. Finally, they came to the conclusion that it probably did but didn’t help them in the least.

“Well ... What else is on this street?” asked Gasper.

Enol tried to remember all of the places they had passed on the way here. “Well ... there’s the clothing store ... the barber shop ... the pornography palace ... the frompe shop ...”

“You know,” said Gasper, “I sure could go for a nice, hot cup of frompe, right about now.”

Enol agreed, so they made their way down the street to the frompe shop, which appeared to be somewhat closed for the night. It also seemed to have typically small air ducts, quite locked doors, and a normally high roof. The dumpster also appeared to have the usual lack of pointy, metal, lock-picking devices that they had already come to expect.

“Crud,” swore Gasper. “I think much better when I’m drinking frompe.”

Enol nodded in agreement.

“Admittedly, I’m usually thinking about sports or something, but still ...”

“Windows.”

“What?”

“Gasper, frompe shops have windows. Windows are made of glass. Glass breaks easily.”

“Hey, yeah!” said Gasper. “That’s it! We can break in through the windows!”

“As before,” said Enol, “I was just making that point.”

After a quick look around, Enol managed to locate a brick that he thought would make quite a nice window-breaker. He started to heave it through the window, himself, but, remembering his lackluster performance at the Crogters/Lussers game, decided against it. “Here,” he said, handing over the brick, “maybe you’d better do the honors.”

Gasper did the honors quite poorly, sending the brick through the window of the store to the left of the frompe shop. After doing this three more times, he decided that a new strategy was called for, so he tried throwing the brick at the store to the right of the frompe shop. The resulting shattered frompe shop glass seemed to indicate that this plan worked quite satisfactorily.

Gasper and Enol carefully made their way through the broken window and used the frompe shop equipment to brew themselves a couple of #126’s. In the process of doing so, Gasper happened to stumble onto a knife, which was quite pointy and fairly metallic. He stored this in his pocket for later use in his assault against the hardware store door lock.

After finishing their beverages, the duo made their way back down the street and to the hardware store. There, Gasper inserted the pointy end of the knife into the door-locking mechanism. He tried turning it, twisting it, tilting it ... Yet, the door still insisted that it would much rather remain closed, thank you very much. Finally, after a bit more



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fumbling, Gasper removed a twisted piece of metal that looked not so much like a knife as a meticulously constructed piece of modern art.

"This is useless," declared Gasper.

"Well," suggested Enol, "I suppose we could always try the brick, again."

"Good idea," said Gasper, tossing aside the former knife.

The two returned to the frompe shop, took the brick, and went back to the hardware store to chuck it through the window. Inside, they found a wide assortment of ladders. They grabbed the longest one they could find and drug it to the alley outside, where they propped it up against the side of the bank. They then used it to climb to the roof, which proved to be disappointingly devoid of anything at all resembling an entrance. Glumly, they climbed back down and rammed the ladder through the window, instead.

As he stepped over the broken glass, Enol looked around and asked, "So, just where do they keep the money at, anyway?"

"I don't know," said Gasper. "Somewhere in the back, probably."

That sounded good to Enol, so they made their way to the back of the building, where they discovered a long hallway lined with doors.

"Maybe it's in one of these rooms," suggested Gasper. "I'll take the left. You check out the right."

Enol agreed that this sounded like a sensible idea and proceeded to open the first door on his right.

Meanwhile, Gasper went to the left. The first door there contained an office of some sort. The second was also an office. The third was yet another office. So was the fourth. The fifth door was an office with a man in it.

"Oh ... Sorry ..."

"Huh ... Wha ..." pointed out the man, removing the seat of his pants from the seat of the chair his rump had just been occupying. "Who the hell are you?"

"I ... Er ... I'm ..." answered Gasper. "I'm a guard."

"A what?"

"I'm a guard," repeated Gasper.

"Are not," insisted the man.

"Am so," said Gasper. "And, anyway, how would you know?"

"Because I'm the guard."

"Oh ... Ah ..."

"And don't go saying you're another guard," advised the man, "cause

this bank's only got one security guard."

"Yes ... I ... Er ... I think you misunderstood," fumbled Gasper.  
"I'm not a security guard, you see ..."

"Well, then, what are ya?"

"I am," said Gasper, "the guard guard."

"The ... what?"

"The guard guard," said Gasper.

"What on Kanteron 6 are you blabberin' about?"

"Well," explained Gasper, "you don't think they're stupid enough to let just one guy roam around the bank all by himself, night after night, do you?"

"Well ... I ..."

"Why, you could do anything!"

"Er ..."

"No, of course they're not," continued Gasper. "That's where I come in, you see. I'm the guard guard. It's my job to guard the guard and make sure you do your job by guarding the thing you're supposed to guard. Understand?"

The guard scratched his head. "I'm not sure ..."

Suddenly, Enol's head popped in through the door and said, "Hey, I looked down the hall, but I didn't ... Oh ... Excuse me ..."

"Who is that!?" exclaimed the guard.

"Er ..."

"Oh, him," said Gasper, "he's ... uh ... the guard guard guard."

"The guard guard guard?"

"Yes," said Gasper. "The guard guard guard."

"Is this true?" asked the guard.

"Oh ... er ... yes ..." said Enol.

"You see, as the security guard," explained Gasper, "you guard the bank. As the guard guard, it's my job to guard you. He's the guard guard guard. He has to guard me."

"He ... He does?"

"Yes," said Gasper. "After all, they have to have someone to keep an eye on me, too, now don't they?"

"Well ... I suppose ..."

"So, he makes sure I don't mess up when I'm guarding you."

"Oh, yes," said Enol, catching on. "I'll have to dock his pay, now, because he let himself be seen."

"Wait a minute, though," said the guard, looking at Enol, "if he

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guards me and you guard him, then who guards you?"

"Oh," said Enol, "that would be the 4guard."

"The 4guard?"

"The 4guard."

"And what about him?"

Enol said, "He's watched by the 5guard."

"And him?"

"The 6guard."

"The 6guard?"

"Yes," said Enol. "They go all the way up, you see."

"This sounds awfully complicated ..."

"Look, it's really very simple," explained Gasper. "There's a guard for every guard to keep an eye on that guard and make sure he doesn't do anything he's not supposed to do while he's guarding the guard he's supposed to guard."

"Oh ... But ..."

"Now, I don't suppose you have anymore stupid questions."

"Well ... Actually ..."

"Good," said Gasper, "because I came in here for a reason, you see."

"Oh ..."

Gasper went on, "I came to ask if you'd seen a guy come through here, tonight."

"Well ... No ... Not really ..."

"What?" said Gasper in fake shock. "He came right through here. You had to have seen him, otherwise you obviously wouldn't have been doing your job very well, and I'd have to report you."

"Oh," said the guard, "well, maybe I do remember somebody ..."

"Good," said Gasper. "I think he was going to try to take some money. Did you see which way he was going?"

"Er ... Maybe he was ... headed to the vault ..."

"Yes?"

"Um ... Going down the hall to the last door on the left ..."

"Thanks," said Gasper. Then, to Enol, he said, "Come on, let's go."

"Do you need any help?" asked the guard.

"No, no, that's okay," said Gasper. "We can handle this, ourselves. What I want you to do is to stay in here, lock this door, and make absolutely sure that nobody—and I mean nobody, not him or me or even you—goes through it till morning. Think you can handle that?"

"Er ... Yes ... I suppose ..."

“Good.”

When Enol and Gasper left the room, the door slammed shut behind them, and they heard the metallic clinking of the locking mechanism.

As they walked down the hall, Gasper turned to Enol and said, “They go all the way up?”

“Well,” answered Enol, “I had to tell him something, didn’t I? Otherwise he’d have had us there till morning. I think I might have gotten to 568 guard before the police showed up to arrest us.”

“Well, it worked,” said Gasper, “and, thanks to me, we even know where the vault is. Am I a smooth talker or what?”

“I think you might possibly have been aided, in part, by the fact that that guard maybe isn’t very particularly bright.”

“Maybe,” admitted Gasper, “but it was still a pretty good bit of talking, if I do say so myself.”

“You would say so, yourself,” pointed out Enol. “You’d also say that women find you irresistible and that *The Hand of Namos* is the greatest movie on the planet.”

“Hey! *The Hand of Namos* is just really misunderstood, okay. That’s all.”

“Whatever you say. All I know is that, when a single car drives down a road for twenty minutes without any dialogue, I start to lose interest.”

“They were building tension,” argued Gasper.

“If you ask me,” said Enol, “they were building boredom.”

“Shut up. Here we are.”

The last door on the left looked exactly like all of the previous doors on the left. It also bore a striking resemblance to those on the right, as well. Opening it, however, revealed a room containing a door that bore a striking resemblance to a very large safe.

Enol gave the door a tug and suggested, “Maybe you’d like to go back and ask him what the combination is.”

“Crud,” said Gasper. “Crud, crud, crud, crud, crud, crud, crud, crud, crud.”

“Crud,” added Enol.

Gasper examined the door. There were four knobs. On each knob was an arrow that, when turned correctly, would point to the appropriate character. The combination appeared to use letters instead of numbers. “Okay,” said Gasper, “try this. O”

Enol turned the first knob and said, “O.”

Gasper said, “P.”

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Enol turned the second knob. "P."

"E."

Third knob. "E."

"N."

"N."

There was a clicking sound, and the door slowly slid open. Enol said, "Oh ... Groovy."

"Yes," agreed Gasper. "Very."

"You know," added Enol, staring at the piles of green paper on the other side of the door, "that no one is ever going to believe this."

"Who cares? Come on. Let's go inside."

Inside the vault was money. Lots of money. Lots and lots of beautiful, green currency. Enol and Gasper stuffed as much of it as they could into their outfits and left the bank a full thirty-seven kilos heavier. At Enol's insistence, they left behind eighty-seven dollars, which they estimated to be enough to sufficiently cover the price of one ladder, two cups of frompe, and three broken windows.



## **Chapter 33**

### **Paying Up**

Romby's phone rang. It rang, again. Then, it rang a third time. This is about where Romby's hand reached out to pick up the receiver. "Hello," he said.

"Er ... Hi ... It's me," said the phone, "Enol."

"Ah, yes, I was wondering when you might get around to calling."

"Er ... Well," said the phone, "that would be now, I suppose."

"Yes," replied Romby. "I'd gathered as much."

"Anyway," said Enol, "I just called to say I've got your money."

"Oh, jolly good. How much, exactly?"

"Er ... Well ... Let's see ... Three million two hundred twenty-four thousand eight hundred dollars."

"Wow, that's a lot."

"Yes ... I know ... So, should I mail it to you or do you want to come and pick it up or maybe ...?"

"There's just one problem," Romby pointed out.

"Um ... There is?"

"You see, Kilo Jopset called five minutes ago and offered me three million two hundred twenty-four thousand eight hundred eighty-seven dollars."

"Wha-what?"

"Sorry, Enol, but I'm afraid you lose."

"No ... Wait ..."

"Oh, by the way, I just sent off the script for next week's episode, so you should be getting it sometime within the next day or two."

"But ..."

"Goodbye."



The buzzing sound in Enol's right ear seemed to indicate that Romby's side of the conversation had come to an end. "Phenol."

"What is it?" asked Gasper.

"Kilo Jopset ..." Enol stopped when he saw Gasper sitting in Mervin and Quipsar in her metal chair, leaving no unoccupied seats available for him. "Kilo Jopset," he continued, "already offered him eighty-seven dollars more."

"Well," said Gasper, somewhat insultingly, "at least you didn't compromise on your principles, Mr. 'I don't wanna steal the ladder.'"

"Shut up," suggested Enol, looking for a suitable place to rest his hindquarters. "I'm trying to think."

"Shh ..." Quipsar pointed towards the FV, where a special news bulletin was in progress. "You guys, stop arguing. You might want to see this."

Enol and Gasper turned to look at the FV, where a reporter was standing on the street in front of a hardware store. He was saying, "... And, at this hardware store, last night, a window was broken out, and someone stole a ladder."

"Did not," insisted Enol, lowering himself to the floor.

"He can't hear you, honey," observed Quipsar.

"Shh!" said Gasper. "I can't hear him."

"Turn it up," suggested Enol, eyeing the chair and preparing his legs for a quick dash.

Gasper picked up the remote control and pressed the volume button. Disappointed, Enol relaxed.

On-screen, the reporter continued, "It is, as yet, unclear whether or not this incident is at all related to either of the other incidents at the bank—where a window was broken out and a small sum of money taken—or at the frompe shop—where a window was broken out and two cups of frompe stolen. Here with us, now, to discuss the case is Police Officer Henrik. Hello, Officer."



“Good afternoon.”

“Do you have any leads in this case that you can share with us?”

“Well,” said Officer Henrik, holding up a twisted piece of metal that no longer looked like a knife, “thus far, the only real, hard piece of evidence we’ve been able to find is this piece of modern art, which we believe may have been left behind by the perpetrator. Now, as you can see, this particular piece of modern art is made of metal, has a wooden handle, and most likely represents the futility of man’s struggle in the recent, neo-political state of the modern geo-galactic economy. It is reminiscent of the work of the late Pimwy Dolger but seems largely inspired by Fennog Lospov’s *Lament of a Castelbee*, which is widely regarded to be the single most anti-oppressive work of modern art to be constructed within the last fifty years.”

“Fascinating,” commented the reporter. “Can you tell us anything about the criminal through this piece of modern art?”

“Certainly,” answered Henrik. “You’d be surprised at just how much we can learn about an individual through the detailed analysis of a single piece of modern art. For example, with even just a quick, cursory analysis, I’ve already theorized that the person responsible for this piece is probably a male in his late twenties. He appears to be reasonably intelligent. I’d say that his high school GPA was most likely somewhere between 3.1 and 3.6. He appears to have a fairly liberal belief system, likes bright colors, warm soup, and probably has between three and seven grobleks.”

“Truly amazing,” observed the reporter. “Can you share any information with our viewers concerning either of the other crimes?”

“Those have both been assigned to other officers, so there’s not much I can say,” answered Officer Henrik, “though I do understand that the bank security guard might have possibly seen someone headed towards the vault, planning to take some money. He’s been working with police sketch artists all morning, but, so far, the only thing he’s been able to tell us with any degree of certainty is that the man in question was ‘vague,’ ‘ambiguous,’ and ‘hard to describe.’ Naturally, if anyone out there knows of someone who fits that description, we’d like to hear from you.”

“I’m sure our viewers will do anything they can to help. Thank you for your time, Officer.”

When the report was over, Gasper switched off the FV.

Enol turned to him, and said, “Well, so long as you don’t get any grobleks in the near future, I think we might just get away with this.”

"Yes," said Gasper, "but what good has it done us? We're still eighty-seven dollars short, remember?"

"Yes ..."

"We could have a bake sale," suggested Quipsar.

"Won't work," answered Enol, realizing that it was very difficult to assert power from his position on the floor. "The public doesn't like politicians who hold bake sales."

"I take it they don't like politicians who lie about their FV shows, either," observed Quipsar.

To make himself feel a little more in charge of the situation, Enol stood up. This, however, only drew attention to the fact that he was the only person in the room without a chair. "You're not helping," he said weakly.

"From what I can see, neither are you," answered Quipsar.

"Shut up," said Enol.

"Why don't we all just shut up?" interjected Gasper.

"You shut up," requested Enol.

"I will," answered Gasper. "I'm included in 'we all,' you see."

"Oh ..."

With that, they all shut up. Or their mouths did, anyway. Their brains kept yammering on and on, mostly about what idiots the others were, but, every now and then, something about their current predicament would somehow manage to squeeze itself in. Enol's thought processes, for example, went something like this: "Man, that Gasper sure is a dope ... Telling me to shut up. I'll tell him to shut up ... Oh, I already did ... and he did ... but still ... he knew that was my chair. What a jerk. And he's a doofus, too. In fact, they should start a doofus hall of fame just so they can put Gasper in it. I wonder if they already have a doofus hall of fame ... No, probably not. I do wish we could figure out what to do about this eighty-seven dollars rubbish. And what about Quipsar? Bake sale? Pshaw! Don't make me laugh. I'll bake sale her ..." Well, it went on and on, more or less exactly like this for some time, though a few of the later thoughts were more concerned with FV and who was going to be on Himber Lagcroft, tonight.

Finally, Gasper broke his semi-self-imposed silence and said, "I have an idea."



In The Kanteron 6 Center for Shopping and Goods Acquisition,

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nestled snugly between the usual win-a-new-mode-of-transportation-type boxes, there was a different kind of box. It didn't offer any kind of prize, whatsoever. Instead, it had a picture of a small boy that only a well-trained eye could have recognized as a digitally-altered Dernkid. Underneath the digital boy were the words, "Please help. My name is Fimmy. I am eight years old, cute, and very sick. If I don't manage to raise eighty-seven dollars for a new brain implant, I shall surely die a most horrible death. Please give generously."



## **Chapter 34**

### **Crud Happens**

Not only was Romby's house bigger than Enol's apartment but everything contained in it happened to be magenta, the current color of fashion. Presumably, a fairly successful screenwriter like Romby was reasonably well off. Better off, at least, than Enol, which rather made him feel that their current roles of blackmailer and blackmailee probably should have been reversed. There wasn't much that could be done about that at this moment in time, however, so he grudgingly counted out the money, bill by bill. "One ... Two ... Three ..."

Meanwhile, Gasper looked at Romby's furniture. Magenta was really nice and all, but he personally felt that the flannel gave a really nice touch to his own home, no matter how much his visitors might laugh at it.

Enol continued to count, "One hundred thirty-one ... One hundred thirty-two ... One hundred thirty-three ..."

Romby watched the cash flopping down on the frompe table with great interest. Each bill that took its place amidst the jumble of coasters and half-written screenplays made him just a little bit richer, something that always tended to bring a smile to his face.

"Two thousand three hundred ninety-nine ... Three thousand ... Three thousand one ..."

Gasper tried to stay awake. The seventeen cups of frompe he'd drank

on the trip here didn't seem to be enough. Of course, the fact that he now had to pee quite badly helped, at least a little bit, to keep his eyes open. However, if his eyes were suddenly to shut, this digestive side effect could lead to a fair amount of future embarrassment. To avert this possibility, he picked a paper clip up off of the table and started fiddling with it in an attempt to prevent himself from dozing off.

"Twenty-six thousand five hundred twelve ... Twenty-six thousand five hundred thirteen ... Twenty-six thousand five hundred fourteen ..."

Gaspar started to wonder why he and Enol had only seemed to bring one-dollar bills. He was sure there must have been a reason for it, but he couldn't quite seem to recall what it might have been.

"Seven hundred fifty-six thousand forty-three ... Seven hundred fifty-six thousand forty-four ... Seven hundred fifty-six thousand forty-five ..."

Gaspar couldn't help noticing the scripts and notebooks littering the frompe table. After all that Romby had put them through, however, there was no way on Kanteron 6 he was going to ask about them.

Finally, Enol approached the end of his counting. "Three million two hundred twenty-four thousand eight hundred eighty-six ... Three million two hundred twenty-four thousand eight hundred eighty-seven ... Three million two hundred twenty-four thousand eight hundred eighty-eight." He stretched his arms and sighed in satisfaction. "There it is. All of it. All three million two hundred twenty-four thousand eight hundred eighty-eight dollars of it."

"Very good," said Romby. "Now, let me count it."

"What?" asked Gaspar, still twisting the paper clip between his fingers. "Don't you trust us?"

"It's not that," Romby assured him. "It's just that I happen to like counting money."

"Well, can't you do it some other time?" asked Enol. "We're kind of in a hurry."

Apparently, though, Romby was already too intent in his money-counting to hear what was said to him, because he went ahead and counted, anyway. "One ... Two ... Three ... Four ..." Seven hours and a bit later, he came to the bottom of the rather large, green stack. "Three million two hundred twenty-four thousand eight hundred eighty-six ... Three million two hundred twenty-four thousand eight hundred eighty-seven ... Three million two hundred twenty-four thousand eight hundred eighty-eight." Romby nodded appreciatively. "Excellent. Well, fellows,

you did it. You outbid Kilo Jopset. I don't know how you did it. In fact, something tells me I probably don't want to know how you did it. Nevertheless, rest assured that I am very glad you did."

"What?" said Enol, as he awoke. "You mean, because, deep down inside, you really wanted to remain loyal to the Vasphouden campaign?"

"Well ... No," answered Romby. "It's just that I needed an extra dollar to afford that really groovy stereo I had my eyes on."

"Oh ..."

"Kilo Jopset was really stubborn about that extra dollar," he went on. "He said, 'A man has to draw the line somewhere, Romby. I draw that particular line at three million two hundred forty-seven thousand eight hundred eighty-seven dollars.'"

"Well, at least he stuck to his principles," said Enol. "Unfortunately, it seems that principles are something a politician can rarely afford to stick to."

"You mean 'fortunately,'" corrected Gasper, setting aside a twisted piece of metal that no longer bore any discernible resemblance to a paper clip.

"No," said Enol, "I mean unfortunately for Kilo Jopset."

"Oh, yeah," said Gasper, "I agree with that, but, as you're the one talking, I think your statement implies that it's unfortunate for you."

"Well, it isn't. It's unfortunate for Kilo Jopset."

"Yes," said Gasper, "I just agreed with that, but ..."

"Look," interrupted Romby, "this is really fascinating and all, but I have things ... That is, I need to ... What I mean to say is ... Well ... Look ... Just get the hell out of my house, okay?"



Back at his apartment, Enol settled into Louie, which was the last, real, final name of his chair.

Since Quipsar was in the folding chair, Gasper was forced to take his place on the floor, a fact the other two felt to be a great example of justice in action.

Attempting to ignore the smirks on their faces, Gasper turned to Enol and said, "Well, I'm sure glad that's over with."

"Me, too," answered Enol. "That last scene was wacky."

"What?"

"Huh?"

"I was talking about getting the money and paying off Romby,"

explained Gasper.

“Oh ...”

“So what were you talking about?”

“Oh, nothing,” replied Enol.

“No, really, what was it?”

“Nothing.”

“No, tell me,” insisted Gasper.

Enol argued, “It was nothing, okay. That’s all it was. Why would I say I was talking about nothing if I wasn’t talking about nothing?”

“I’m not sure that sentence is grammatically accurate.”

“What do you mean?”

Gasper said, “Well, you used a double negative, didn’t you?”

No one really noticed Enol’s lack of understanding. He looked confused so often that everyone just assumed it was his normal face. “What are you getting at?”

“Well, a double negative is a positive. If you weren’t talking about nothing, then you obviously must have been talking about something.”

“But I wasn’t,” insisted Enol. “That was my whole point.”

“Then why did you say it?”

“Say what?”

“Whatever it was you said.”

Enol scratched his head. “Er ... I’m confused.”

Gasper considered this reply, then said, “Well, I suppose that’s as good an answer as any. Besides, now that it’s over with, it probably doesn’t matter, anymore.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Nothing.”

“Well, if it’s nothing, then why did you ...” Enol stopped, deciding it wasn’t worth bothering with. “Never mind.”

“I won’t.”

“What?”

“Nothing.”

Attempting to deal with the current state of bafflement which pervaded every inch of the apartment, Enol suggested, “Why don’t we just watch some FV?”

Everyone agreed that this sounded like a fine idea, so Quipsar switched on the FV, which was currently showing the new movie, *Spicho*. Actually, technically speaking, it wasn’t really a new movie. It was a remake of an older film of the same name. The original *Spicho*—directed



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by one of Kanteron 6's most talented filmmakers, Veequar Laddino—had been released thirty years ago to rave reviews. It had gone on to become a great classic, beloved by all of Kanteron 6. Since it was so well-liked and was generally considered to be very nearly flawless, no one was ever able to satisfactorily explain why it needed to be remade.

The only bit of critical praise given to the new *Spicho* was by the film's makers, who called it "a rousing, must-see adventure" and declared it to be "one of the best movies of all time." Also, though the source could never be positively identified, the movie poster featured the quote: "It is ... the [best] ... Movie ... I ... have ever ... Seen!" Apart from that, the best thing anyone had ever said about the *Spicho* remake was that it had "pretty colors." Since the earnings of the newer movie had been decidedly low, it was unlikely that anyone would ever choose to do a remake of the remake, which was somewhat ironic as the newer movie would probably have benefited more from a remake than the original had. Unfortunately, though, everyone in the Kanteron 6 film industry was far too busy remaking good movies into bad ones to ever attempt to remake a bad movie into a good one.

At this moment in time, however, the three of them only got to suffer through the first thirty minutes of *Spicho*, as it was interrupted for a special news bulletin. "We interrupt our special presentation of *Spicho* to bring you this special news bulletin."

"Darn," said Enol. "Just when it was getting mediocre ..."

Somehow, the door the reporter was standing in front of seemed to look disturbingly familiar. "Today is truly a sad day in the history of Kanteron 6," the reporter said. "We are here, live, to cover the murder of Romby Fansjen, writer of such beloved films as *The Hand of Namos* and the remake of *Spicho*."

Enol's eyes widened. "What?"

Quipsar considered informing her husband of the FV's inability to transmit his sound waves to the other person but decided that it probably wouldn't accomplish anything more than her previous attempts at doing so had.

Oblivious to this—because FV was a one-way communications device—the reporter continued, "We are standing, now, outside the door of his home. We shan't be taking you inside, as ... well ... the details are rather grisly. Here to talk with us is Police Officer Henrik, whom our viewers will, no doubt, recognize from such classic Kanteronian capers as *The Great Taffy Factory Holdup* and *The Hardware Store Robbery*."

How are you, Mr. Henrik?”

“I’m fine.”

The reporter said, “The last time we met was at the scene of The Hardware Store Robbery I’ve already mentioned. Now, I’m curious ... Does your presence here indicate that this crime was carried out by the same perpetrator?”

“We don’t want to jump to any conclusions,” answered Henrik, “but we do have evidence that the two crimes may be connected.”

“Such as?”

“Such as the fact that we’ve located an amount of money which evidence suggests might have been stolen from the bank.” Henrik then held up a familiar, twisted piece of metal that no longer bore any discernible resemblance to a paper clip and added, “Also, we’ve managed to locate this piece of modern art, which we believe to have been made by the same artist who was present at The Hardware Store Robbery.”

Normally, the description of a pair of angry-looking eyes as “fiery” is merely an exaggeration. In the case of Enol’s as he glared at Gasper, however, it wasn’t much of one.

The reporter, who very nearly felt the heat emanating from Enol’s eyes, even through the FV, asked, “Do you have any leads on who this mystery artist might be?”

“Well, we’ve run a computerized style check against all known modern artists, and we’ve managed to narrow it down to several possible suspects. Also, a neighbor has reported seeing two men exit the house a short time before an anonymous phone call reported the murder, but, of course, we don’t want to reveal too many details, just yet.”

“Of course,” agreed the reporter. “Is there anything you’d like to say to our home viewers?”

“Yes, there is,” answered Henrik. “I’d like to encourage anyone that knows who created this art to call us, immediately. With your help, we may be able to stop this artist before he creates, again.”

Still glowering in Gasper’s direction, Enol said, “Now, I’m not mad or anything, but I do kind of wish that, if you felt the urge to express your creativity, you would have chosen to maybe try to do so when we weren’t *in the middle of committing a major crime.*”

Gasper sheepishly answered, “Really? You sound mad.”

“Okay,” admitted Enol, “so maybe I am mad.”

In an unsuccessful attempt not to look too stupid, Gasper argued, “But we didn’t commit that crime.”

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“No,” agreed Enol, “but it was still cruddy timing. The police don’t know we didn’t do it, do they? Why don’t we go and tell them? I’m sure they’ll believe us. We’ll tell them we didn’t do it.”

“Well ...”

“You know who else says they didn’t do it, Gasper? Guilty people. That’s who.”

“But we didn’t do it,” insisted Gasper. “As a matter of fact, we know who did.”

“We do?”

“Yes,” Gasper explained, his stupidity levels seeming to lower slightly, “Romby specifically told you that Kilo Jopset had threatened his life, didn’t he?”

Enol considered this. Enlightenment dawned on his face as he actually began to understand something that was going on for a change. “Yes ... Yes, he did ... But, Gasper, we can’t tell people that. They’ll probably find out that we lied about our FV show, and they will find out that we did rob the bank.”

Quipsar interrupted, “Why don’t ...”

“Look,” re-interrupted Enol, “if you’re going to suggest we throw another bake sale, you can forget it.”

“No,” said Quipsar. “Actually, I was going to suggest we organize a charity fbaseball game.”

A very puzzled Gasper asked, “What on Kanteron 6 for?”

“Well ... It just seemed like something fun to do, I guess ...”

“But it doesn’t really help us, now does it?”

“Well ... Maybe ... I guess ... Shut up.”

“You shut up,” suggested Enol.

“Why doesn’t everyone shut up?” said Gasper, experiencing the previously referred to difficulty inherent in exerting authority from the floor.

“You sh ...” Enol paused, then asked, “Haven’t we had this conversation, before?”

“Yeah,” said Gasper. “I think we have.”

“What decision did we come to, then?”

“I think,” replied Gasper, “that we decided to glue Dernkid’s picture to a box and stick it in The Center for Shopping and Goods Acquisition.”

“Ah, yes,” said Enol. “Do you think that will help us, now?”

Gasper thought about it. “No, I don’t think so.”

“Damn.”

“I think,” said Gasper, “that we’ve no choice but to sit back, cross our fingers, and hope no one manages to trace any artwork back to us.”

“Yes,” agreed Enol. “And if you have anymore creative impulses, in the meantime, I would suggest that you attempt to channel them into some form of pantomime, instead.”

## **Chapter 35**

### **The Great Debate**

The next few weeks passed by rather awkwardly for the Vasphouden campaign team. Worried about the possibility of an impending arrest, Gasper and Enol watched more FV news shows than any other Kanteronian since ... Well ... Ever. The tension even seemed to rub off on those around them. Quipsar, for example, found that her glazer purchases were beginning to lose some of their former bliss; however, it is quite possible that this had more to do with the fact that she was beginning to suspect that a glazer wouldn't really complete her life, after all, than with her husband's legal and political problems. Even Dernkid's life felt quite awkward, though, admittedly, no more so than usual.

Enol and Gasper had to set aside their worry, though, because there was a very important event coming up. It was The Great Debate. The Great Debate was the biggest event in Kanteron 6 politics. There, the Supreme Ruler candidates from each group would argue about the issues, insult the other candidates, and, in general, try to make everybody want to vote for them. Normally, crud groups weren't allowed to attend The Great Debate, but, since Enol's strong showings in the polls could not be denied—no matter how much those in charge might try—an extraordinarily rare exception was made. In fact, given Opem's decidedly low showings, several disgruntled crud groups argued that the ponies should

be excluded from this event for precisely the same reason that they had been excluded from so many others. Organizers of the event, however, called this idea “ludicrous” and pointed out that Opem must be permitted to address the planet at the debate “for obvious reasons that only the most dimwitted of Kanteronians would need explained to them.” That tended to shut people up.

In preparation for the debate, Enol and Gasper were required to do quite a bit of research. They researched the sorts of questions that were typically asked at this kind of thing. They researched bad things they might say about Kilo Jopset. They researched bad things Kilo Jopset might say about them. First of all, though, they had to do research to find out what sorts of things they should do research on.

They found much useful information in the new official Kanteron 6 politician’s guide. This book, officially titled *Running a Political Campaign for Stupid Idiots*,<sup>1</sup> was written by Jonu Laskuk, author of such popular Kanteronian literature as *Government for Stupid Idiots*, *Knitting for Stupid Idiots*, and *The Stupid Idiot’s Guide to Writing Stupid Idiot Books*. It had recently supplanted the older official politician’s guide, *The People’s Government*, which had been written by Mosca Fennerson, author of *The Kanteron 6 Constitution*. At the time, there had been a fair amount of debate concerning whether or not this change should be made. Its opponents argued that “a tried and tested tome written by one of Kanteron 6’s greatest leaders should not be so lightly discarded for an intellectually inferior pamphlet by an inexperienced writer with only a cursory knowledge of the fundamental intricacies of Kanteron 6 politics.” Those in favor of the change, however, argued that the newer book was “easier to understand” and that the opponents were “just a bunch of uppity stupid-heads, anyway.”

Finally, the big day came. Enol paced back and forth in his dressing room. Since this event normally had only two participants, an extra dressing room had to be added in order to accommodate the third person. Thus, Enol was fairly certain that, at one time, his dressing room had most likely been a supply closet or something. If so, though, it must have been a pretty big supply closet. Perhaps this place just had an abnormally large number of supplies. Or maybe they had knocked through a couple of walls or something to make the room bigger. That

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<sup>1</sup> It is unclear whether the stupid idiots mentioned in the title are the politicians or the people who vote for them. Most people simply choose to believe that it refers to whichever one they’re not.

wasn't important, though. What was important was the debate. Enol tried desperately to think about something other than the dressing room but found it difficult. Perhaps they'd intentionally given him the most distracting dressing room. No, that was stupid. Where did that idea come from? Why was he even thinking about this?

Enol tried to think of something else, so he focused ... Focused ... Focused on the doorknob. No, dammit, that was part of the dressing room, too. Enol slapped himself to try and get a hold of his thoughts. He was going to have to concentrate on the debate. He needed to be focused on what he was going to do and say. He needed to know whose idea it had been to paint the wall that particular shade of brown, anyway.

Enol slapped himself, again. Then, he cleared his mind and focused on his shoelace. That was better. He concentrated as hard as he could, focusing with all of his ... whatever it is you focus with. He was so focused, in fact, that he very nearly didn't notice when the guy arrived at his door to tell him to come to the stage.



Before the show, Gamry focused on his hair. Gamry Samvice was this year's official host of The Great Debate. He was focusing on his hair because he always focused on his hair. He found his hair very important. The reason for this was that people were constantly making fun of his bad hairpiece. Since Gamry didn't actually wear a hairpiece, he was generally very puzzled about this.

He'd spent more time and money than he'd like to admit on the upkeep of his hair. He'd experimented with countless different styles and colors. He even spent several hours a day simply combing it in different ways. The goal, of course, was to make his hair look as natural as possible. Thus far, he had been quite unsuccessful. It seemed the more he tried, the more people were convinced that the hair on his scalp did not belong to him. One time, he'd gone so far as to try shaving his head, but, even then, everyone had insisted that he was wearing a skullcap. Tonight, though ... Tonight could just possibly be the night he'd been waiting so long for. Tonight, he could just maybe, possibly, finally get it right. Gamry combed some of his hair to the left, some to the right, some forward, some back, and put a little twist in the middle. There. If that didn't look natural, he didn't know what did.

Satisfied with his cosmetological appearance, Gamry walked out to greet his audience. It was a big audience. On Kanteron 6, the percentage

of people who actually gave a stilk's arble about politics was quite insanely tiny. When all of those people, however, got together in a single room at the same time, it tended to give the impression that there were really a lot more of them than there actually were.

It was this percentage of the population that Gamry addressed, now. "Good evening, everybody. Ladies and gentlemen ... Boys and girls ... Kanteronians of non-specific gender and/or age ... Welcome to Great Debate LXII! Here, we shall witness an important moment in Kanteron 6 history, as three candidates compete for the right to be our planet's leader. I'm Gamry Samvice, and I'll be your host, tonight.

"Without further adieu, allow me to introduce tonight's contenders. First off, behind the red podium, debating for the hippos, is the star of FV's 'Slomac.' Everybody, please give a big round of applause for Kilo Jopset!"

As Kilo Jopset walked out to take his place behind the proper podium, half of the audience cheered, while the other half booed.

When he'd reached the appropriate position and the crowd had died down, Gamry went on, "Now, behind the purple podium, debating for the cuckoos, we have the man who created his own political group and revolutionized our ideas about politics. Everyone welcome Enol Vasp-houden!"

The half of the audience that booed before cheered, and the other half booed. Meanwhile, Enol stepped onto the stage, nervously took his place behind the purple podium, and tried not to sweat too much.

"Finally," announced Gamry, "last but certainly not least, behind the blue podium, for the ponies, we have the politician who voted in favor of bill #3879735 and proposition #3905652. Let's hear it for Arcandle Opem!"

The crowd was silent as Opem strode professionally across the stage.

"Well, well, well, it's really great to have everyone here, tonight," said Gamry. "How are you all doing?"

"Very good," said Kilo Jopset cheerily.

"I'm fine," said Enol nervously.

"I am doing very well, thank you," answered Opem professionally.

"Good, good. Our first question of the night," said Gamry, turning towards the red podium, "is for Kilo Jopset."

"Fire away, Gamry."

"Kilo Jopset, your show 'Slomac' was a milestone for Kanteron 6 funavision and, to this day, is one of the most-watched shows in the



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galaxy. With that in mind, what do you think you'll be able to offer the planet that your opponents cannot?"

Kilo Jopset answered, "Well, I'm glad you asked. I offer my fellow Kanteronians truth. My character Slomac always stood for truth, and I've always been truthful about the show. That truthfulness, I'm afraid to say, has not made its way into many modern FV programs. In particular, I'm referring to several of these 'real FV' shows. These shows claim to really show real life as it really happens, but that isn't always the case." He shot an accusatory glance at Enol.

Enol tried not to look guilty.

"Well, now," said Gamry, turning to face the purple podium, "Mr. Vasphounden, what do you think you have to offer the planet that Kilo Jopset doesn't?"

"Well," answered Enol, "I stand for truth and justice. I'm hard on crime and a good family man, which I think my FV program clearly shows ..."

"Ha!" laughed Kilo Jopset.

"If I can continue," Enol attempted to continue, "I'd also like to point out that ..."

"Your FV show isn't even real," accused Kilo Jopset.

The crowd was stunned.

Enol said, "Well ..."

"It's all scripted!" said Kilo Jopset.

Enol tried to think of a way to refute this claim but realized he couldn't. Instead, he could only say, "Yeah, well, so was 'Slomac!'"

"Well, at least I never lied about it!" said Kilo Jopset.

"At least I can act!"

"What? You're insane!" exclaimed Kilo Jopset. "Maybe that explains why you robbed that bank, hardware store, and frompe shop!"

Enol yelled out, "Yeah, well, at least I never murdered Romby Fans-jen!"

"No ... That was ... That was just garage talk ..."

"You did!" shouted Enol. "You killed him!"

"No ..."

"You lie!" accused Enol.

"No, you lie!" answered Kilo Jopset.

"Well," said Arcandle Opem, attempting to squeeze a word in, "I think ..."

Enol screamed, "Aaaaaaaarrrrrrrrggggggghhhhhh!!!!!!!" as he leapt

over his purple podium and tackled Kilo Jopset.

Normally, on “Slomac,” this would be the point at which the camera would stop long enough for Kilo Jopset’s stuntman to take over for him. In The Great Debate, however, he was forced to handle this particular assault on his own.

Arcandle Opem slowly backed away.

The battle between Enol Vasphouden and Kilo Jopset was extremely aggressive, extremely violent, and extremely not suitable for FV. Naturally, the ratings were enormous, prompting several FV studio executives to request that the government start to hold Supreme Ruler elections every week. Government officials stated that, while the idea was indeed tempting, the possible collapse of anything at all resembling order that would likely result far outweighed the admittedly high entertainment value that would inevitably accompany it.

Finally, the security guards were able to pry the two warring politicians apart from each other. An enraged Enol attempted to spit on Kilo Jopset. Unfortunately, he missed and instead hit the guard who was holding Kilo Jopset. This guard attempted to spit on Enol but only hit the guard holding Enol, who spat at the first guard and hit Gamry Samvice, who spat on Kilo Jopset, who simultaneously spat on both Gamry and Enol with a single well-hocked loogie, thus completing the circle of saliva.

Despite the moistening of everyone’s faces, though, their aggressive impulses did not appear to greatly diminish. Thus, to avoid further bloodshed, Enol and Kilo Jopset were dragged away and locked in their respective dressing rooms to keep them away from each other.



Enol paced back and forth in his possible former supply closet, feeling a murderous hatred of Kilo Jopset. He wanted out. The door was locked. The sons of female grobleks had locked him in. He needed to get out. He focused on the doorknob. Maybe he could try to bite the doorknob off. Then, he could run down the hall, strangle Kilo Jopset to death, grind his bones into porcelain, and take a big ...

No ... No ... That was a bad idea. He’d probably break his teeth out if he tried to bite the doorknob.



Gasper rushed down the hall. Then, he got to the end of it and real-

ized it was the wrong hall. He turned around, rushed back the other way, and tried a different one. This one did not supply him with any greater amount of success. After a bit of random rushing, Gasper finally found the proper hall and rushed to Enol's dressing room. Standing outside was a rather large security guard with a slightly damp face.

"Is this Enol Vasphouden's dressing room?" asked Gasper.

"Yeah," answered the guard.

"Is he okay?"

"Well ... Yes, I think so ... At least, as far as we can tell."

"Can I go in and talk to him?"

The guard seemed hesitant to allow this. "I'm not sure that's such a good idea."

"What? Why not?"

"Well," said the guard, "you see ..."

Gasper waited for a moment before prodding, "Yes?"

"Well, sir, it's just that ..."

"It's just what?"

"Well, sir, you see ... it's just that he's been ... well ... growling."

Gasper paused for a moment, unsure of whether he'd just heard the guard correctly. "Growling?"

The guard nodded. "Yes, sir. We're not sure it's safe to open the door."

"Can I," asked Gasper, motioning towards the door, "listen?"

"Well ... Okay," replied the guard, "but be careful."

Gasper leaned forward and slowly pressed his ear against the door. He did, indeed, hear a rather menacing, low, guttural sound emanating from within. He straightened back up and scratched his head. Then, he asked, "Are you sure that you put Enol in there and not an animal?"

"Yes, sir," said the guard. "Quite sure."

"Yes ... Well, could there have already been an animal in there when you put him in?"

"No, sir. We checked the security videos."

"Well, have ..." Gasper paused for another moment as his mind jumped to a new train of thought. "You have video cameras in the dressing room?"

The guard answered, a bit uncomfortably, "Um ... Well, we're supposed to have a famous, female singer in there, next week."

"Oh ... What day ...? Never mind."

"I won't."

“What?”

“Nothing.”

Gaspar decided that pursuing this line of argument would likely prove to be merely an exercise in futility, so, instead, he asked, “How long do you plan on keeping him in there?”

“Well, obviously, we’d like to get him out of there as soon as possible. I mean, we can’t leave him there all week, after all.”

“Of course not,” said Gaspar.

“No,” agreed the guard, “so we called some medical people, and they’re on their way over with some tranquilizers.”



“The Great Debate fist fight. What is the world coming to? Enkli.”

“I thought The Great Debate offered up some top quality entertainment. It had drama, suspense, needless violence ... everything I look for in an FV program. It was bloody good fun. They should do this sort of thing more often.”

“Yartle.”

“Last night’s events were an embarrassment to all of Kanteron 6. Both Kilo Jopset and Enol Vaspounden behaved in a completely unacceptable manner. They’ve brought disgrace to our entire system of government. If this is the future of Kanteron 6, perhaps I’d better move.”

“Wespi.”

“Did anybody else get a load of Gamry Samvice’s hairpiece? What a rug!”

## **Chapter 36**

### **Rest and Recovery**

Enol's eyes slowly opened. His head quickly hurt. Why did his head hurt? And was the word "quickly" really a sensible description of the way it hurt? Why was he asking all of these questions? Didn't he know they just made his head hurt more?

Enol couldn't remember much. For the moment, all he was sure of was that he'd just woken up from the most horrible dream. He'd dreamed that he was running for Supreme Ruler. He'd also dreamed that Kilo Jopset was running against him. Then, he'd dreamed that ... Wait a minute ...

"Oh, crud," said Enol. "I can't move."

Further inspection revealed to Enol that his inability to move was quite likely due to the fact that he was currently tied to a bed. The bed was small and rather uncomfortable. It looked a little bit like a hospital bed. In fact, the whole room bore a striking resemblance to the inside of a hospital.

"Oh, you're awake." It was Quipsar.

"Where am I?"

"You're in the hospital," she answered.

Ah ... That would explain the bed and the room, then. "Quipsar, why am I in the hospital?"

"The doctor thought it would be a good idea to keep you here until the tranquilizers wore off."

Tranquilizers ... Well, that probably explained the headache. "And why am I tied to this bed?"

"Well ... The doctor just didn't want you to hurt yourself ..." After a few moments, she added, "Or anyone else."

It all started to come back to him. "I was at the debate ... There was a fight ... Kilo Jopset ... Did I ... kill him?"

"No," said Quipsar, "he's okay."

"Damn."

Before she could reply, Gasper and Dernkid entered the room, having just returned from wherever the heck they'd been.

Presumably excited to see that his father was okay, Dernkid immediately ignored him to stare at the room's single window.

Gasper said, "Hey, Enol. How're you feeling?"

"Tied down and headachey."

"Ah, but not homicidal, then?"

"No, Gasper," replied Enol, "I do not feel homicidal." After a pause, he added, "Though the longer I stay tied to this bed, the more danger there is that I'll fall into that particular frame of mind."

"You don't say."

"I do say," said Enol. "As a matter of fact, I just did. I'm quite sure you heard."

Gasper sat down in one of the room's two uncomfortable chairs and conceded, "Yes, I suppose I did, but, more importantly, I'm afraid we have certain matters that should be discussed. Most notably, certain matters pertaining to the upcoming election which have arisen primarily due to the events of last night."

"Yes, probably so," agreed Enol, "but the position I seem to have currently found myself in is not one that is especially conducive to conversation. Perhaps if you could bring yourself to kindly untie me, you might find that my discussion skills will improve noticeably."

"Sorry, Enol, but I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Well," said Gasper, "it's just we're afraid you might kill somebody."

"Gasper!" interjected Quipsar.

"Well, it's true," said Gasper.

"But I'm not going to kill anybody," Enol attempted to reason with them.

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"I know you aren't," agreed Gasper, leaning forward in his chair and extending a hand of comfort to his friend's shoulder. "Not as long as you're tied down to that bed."

"Okay," said Enol, experimenting with a new strategy, "if that's the way you want it ... Fine. If you don't untie me, you'll be the first victim."

"Sorry, Enol, I can't. Doctor's orders."

"What doctor's orders?"

"Mine," said the white-suited gentleman walking through the door. "I see you're finally awake, now."

"Yes, obviously," said Enol. "I think everyone else has already figured that out, by now."

"Good, good," said the doctor. "My name is Doctor Tarrafin, and I'll be your physician, today. Do you have any questions?"

"Yes, I do."

"Oh? Such as?"

"Why do I have to be tied to this bed?"

The doctor glanced at the chart in his hand, looked up, and assured him, "Oh, it's not anything serious. Nothing to worry about, really. I'm sure you'll be right as rain in a day or two."

"Well, then, untie me."

"Sorry," said Doctor Tarrafin, "but I can't do that. It's just we're afraid you're going to kill somebody. You understand."

"I'll kill ..."

"Look," interrupted Quipsar, "just tell him you won't kill anybody, okay?"

"I won't kill anybody," said Enol.

"Sorry, patient #4359, but I'm afraid I can't take your word on that. Murderers are notorious liars, you see."

Dernkid's eyes stayed glued to the window, which sat there, taunting him. Luckily, he had already grown out of that silly window-breaking phase, so he didn't let it bother him. Instead, he attempted to calculate the number of marshmallows that it would take to cover the glass in a sticky, white paste.

"Well, what do I have to do to get you to let me out of here?" Enol inquired.

Doctor Tarrafin told him, "You can demonstrate to us, beyond a reasonable doubt, that you aren't going to kill anybody when we let you up."

"And how, exactly, do I do that?" asked Enol.

The doctor shrugged. "I don't know. I think I'll probably know what it is I'm looking for once you've done it."

"That isn't very helpful."

"It isn't? Oh dear ... Well, I'm sure you'll figure something out," said the doctor, who then excused himself to go see to some less annoying patient.

Enol stared after the doctor. After a bit of irritated silence, he turned away from the door and said, "Well, who wants to help me escape?"

"Not me," answered Gasper.

"Me, either," said Quipsar.

Enol glanced at the window. If he could somehow shatter it and somehow reach a shard of broken glass, he might somehow be able to cut through the ropes and escape from his predicament. Unfortunately, however, that was a lot of things for him to somehow manage to do.

"Dernkid! Hey, Dernkid, how'd you like to help out your old man?"

"Twenty-one."

"Er ..."

"Don't listen to him, Dernkid," advised Quipsar.

"Yeah," said Gasper. "He might kill you."

"I'll kill you, if you don't shut up," threatened Enol.

"You're only making it worse for yourself," argued Gasper.

"So," said Enol, "are you."

"I don't much care for your attitude."

"I don't much care for your lack of willingness to untie me."

"Well," said Gasper, "seeing as how I'm the one who's untied, I'm afraid you're just going to have to deal with it."

"Okay," said Enol, "now, you're just rubbing it in."

"Well ... A little."

"I don't appreciate it."

"And I don't appreciate the fact that you don't appreciate it," said Gasper.

"Oh, yeah. Well, I don't appreciate that you don't appreciate the fact that I don't appreciate it."

"What you said plus an extra 'I don't appreciate.'"

"Hey!" said Enol. "That's cheating!"

"Too bad."

"Okay, guys, settle down," said Quipsar. "This is getting us nowhere. Maybe we should all just give Enol a chance to calm down."

"You calm down," demanded Enol.



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"I'm sure you'll be more understanding once you've had some time to think it over."

"That's easy for you to say," said Enol. "You're not tied to a bed."

"Come on, everybody. Let's go."

As Gasper and Quipsar stood up and walked out of the door, Dern-kid followed them. Enol called out, "Fine! I didn't want your company, anyway! I'll just entertain myself! I do *like* to lie in bed, you know!"

When he was fairly certain they could no longer hear him, he proceeded to sulk, pausing regularly to vainly think up an escape plan. Why were escape plans so hard to think up? Enol asked himself, "What would Slomac do?" He stopped himself from answering since he didn't want to do anything that Kilo Jopset had done before him. Instead, he tried to think of another FV show and asked himself, "What would Lakki do?" The answer, of course, was that Lakki would rush back home and bark her little heart out until someone came to help. Unfortunately, though, Enol wasn't currently in a position to be rushing anywhere, so that was no good.

He thought that a little bit of FV might help him think. There was one on the wall across the room from his bed. Enol looked to his right. There was a remote control bolted to the stand there. He couldn't reach it with his hands, but he thought that, if he stretched his neck out, he might be able to press the buttons with his nose. He gave it a shot. He had to strain, but he managed to reach it. Unfortunately, with his face so close, it was impossible to tell which buttons his nose was actually hitting. Thus, it took a few minutes of random nose-poking before the FV finally sprang to life.

Even though there was a special news bulletin on, Enol didn't change the channel, as he thought that doing so would likely prove to be much too painful. Luckily enough, however, this particular bulletin happened to be about him.

"Wow," said Enol. "What an unbelievable and unspeakably convenient coincidence."

On the screen, a reporter was talking to Police Officer Henrik. "Officer Henrik, by now we've all heard about Enol Vasphounden's and Kilo Jopset's accusations regarding the crimes you've been investigating. Would you care to comment on this?"

"Well," said Henrik, "some of the evidence does seem to support the claims made at The Great Debate, so we think their stories are at least partially true."

“And what do you plan to do about it?”

“There’s not much we can do,” answered Henrik. “We’re not allowed to arrest famous people. Both Enol Vasphouden and Kilo Jopset are covered by the Celebrity Protection Act, which was passed shortly after the infamous Veequar Laddino trials of ‘85.”

“Ah, yes,” said the reporter. “You’re referring to the incident where thousands of Kanteronians lost their sanity and committed numerous acts of vandalism upon learning that their favorite filmmaker had been found guilty of jaywalking.”

“Yes, that’s the one,” said Henrik. “After that, it was decided that seeing an idol become a criminal was just too stressful for the Kanteronian public. Therefore, both Enol Vasphouden and Kilo Jopset have been deemed unarrestable. We can, however, say that both Vasphouden and Kilo Jopset are, in fact, very bad people and tell them to never ever do this sort of thing, again.”

Well, that was a relief. It felt pretty nice to have one less thing to worry about. Unfortunately, it didn’t quite get Enol standing back on his own two feet, again. Without an accomplice, which no one appeared to be willing to become, there was really only one thing for him to do. He stretched his neck out towards the rope and started to chew.



When Pruma Ninderkos was a young boy, it was his dream to one day become a great fashion designer. He practiced often, spending hours a day filling various notebooks with sketches of dresses, miniskirts, and evening gowns. He even started teaching himself to sew in order to bring his goal a bit closer to reality. It was his father, Rutch Ninderkos, who put a stop to this. Fashion design wasn’t a job for a real man, he said. Thus, he advised his son to find a new dream. Pruma did as his father asked. The new dream was that of becoming a flight attendant. At dinnertime, Pruma would hand out little packets of peanuts and make sure that everyone’s chairs were in their upright and locked positions. Rutch told his son that he should find something else. Something that would let him work with his hands, perhaps. After considering this advice, Pruma began to develop an interest in hairdressing. He purchased a cheap pair of scissors and began to frequently practice on the family groblek. After much trial and error, Pruma’s groblek became the prettiest, most fashionable groblek on the block. Unfortunately for him, this is why his friends made fun of him. Hairdressing, they assured him, was a

job for poofs.

This was all very disheartening for Pruma. Growing up, he toyed with several different career possibilities—dancer, secretary, sports star, waitress—but, every time, someone would mock his masculinity. Finally, though, Pruma settled on a job that he thought would help to preserve what was left of his manly image. He studied hard, spent several years in medical school, and, finally, became a nurse. Pruma took his friends' silence to mean they approved of this career choice, but, in reality, they'd finally just decided to give up on him.

The good thing about being a nurse was that, since you had access to the planet's medical records, you knew which women not to have sex with. The downside was that you had to work with a number of people who tended to throw up on you a lot. In fact, Pruma and some of his fellow nurses had started a pool. Everyone chipped in five dollars, and, at the end of the year, whoever had been thrown up on the most would win the whole lot. Naturally, those nurses with small children at home were excluded from participating, as they already had an unfair advantage.

Of course, because of this pool, all of the nurses were now constantly volunteering to attend to the sickliest patients. Some of the less honest nurses had even begun to intentionally mix up patients' drugs and bring them unfresh foods in an attempt to induce a greater vomiting output. Also effective was the newly-formed practice of using tongue-depressors as tonsil-depressors.

The patient Pruma was about to see, though, most likely wouldn't throw up on him. The patient wasn't even really sick. He was just tied to a bed. Since he was tied down, Pruma was actually going to have to sit there and feed him, spoonful by spoonful. If he crammed the food into the guy's mouth quickly enough, though, he just might get lucky.

Now, wheeling the food tray down the hall, towards room #20835, Pruma passed by a nurse with a rather impressive stain on the front of her uniform. "Wow. Nice one. How many is that for you?" he asked.

"Three hundred twenty-seven," answered the other nurse. "Three more and I'll be tied for the lead."

"Well, good luck," said Pruma, continuing on his way.

Finally, he arrived at his destination, room #20835. Unfortunately, he seemed to have arrived there a bit late, as the patient contained within appeared to have already begun eating.

As the nurse entered the room, Enol looked up from what he was doing, spat out a mouthful of partially chewed rope, and blurted out,

"This isn't what it looks like."

"It's not?"

"No ... Well, I guess that would depend on what it looks like, actually," said Enol.

Pruma said, "It looks as if you're eating the rope that's holding you to that bed."

"Well, okay, yeah, maybe it is what it looks like, then," admitted Enol. "However, I assure you there is a perfectly good explanation."

"Which is?"

Enol thought about it. He started to say something and stopped. Then, he started to say something else and stopped, again. Then, he said, "I seem to have forgotten it."

"Well, Mr. ..." Pruma looked at his chart. "... Vasphounden, I have a slightly more nutritious meal here for ... Well ... Okay, that's a lie. The rope's probably better for you than the hospital food, but I'm supposed to feed it to you, anyway."

"No, thank you. I'd rather just have the rope, if it's all the same to you," Enol said. Then, after using his tongue to remove a small chunk of fiber from between his teeth, he added, "Though, I suppose it would be a bit easier to eat if you'd help me untie it."

"I don't think I'm supposed to do that ..."

"Why not?"

"Because," said Pruma, "you might kill somebody."

Enol tried to not look like a murderer. "No, I think you must have me confused with the guy next door. I'm here for ... a ... um ... operation ... of some kind."

"I don't believe you."

"What? Why not?"

"Because murderers are notorious liars."

"But I'm not a murderer," insisted Enol.

"No. No, I'm sorry."

"Look," pleaded Enol, "there must be something I can do to make you untie me."

"I don't know ..."

"What do you want? Money? Fame? Power? A guest spot on a top-rated FV program? Anything."

"Well ... There may be one thing, but ... No ..."

"No," said Enol, "tell me. What is it?"

"You could," said Pruma, "throw up on me."

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“Er ... What?”

“Just a little on the front of the uniform would be fine.”

“Wait,” said Enol. “Let me get this straight. You want me ... to throw up ... on your uniform?”

“Yes,” said Pruma.

“Is this,” asked Enol cautiously, “some kind of a sex thing?”

“Of course not,” Pruma indignantly exclaimed. “I’m a nurse, not a hairdresser.”

“Er ...”

Pruma held out his arm. “Just a bit on the sleeve will do.”

“I’m not sure I’m comfortable with this,” said Enol.

“Oh, please,” insisted the nurse.

“Well ... Alright ... But you also have to promise to vote for me.”

“Oh, yuck ... Well ... Okay ... I guess ... Just ... don’t tell anybody, okay?”



Gaspar, Quipsar, and Dernkid kept their distance from the vomit-covered gentleman they passed in the hall. A bit later, they came back to Enol’s room, which appeared to be strangely devoid of anything resembling Enol.

“That’s odd,” observed Gaspar.

“Yes,” agreed Quipsar. “Quite.” After a few seconds of silence, she added, “Maybe someone should go find the doctor.”

Gaspar agreed that this sounded like a fine course of action and left to locate the proper personnel. Meanwhile, Quipsar waited in the room, staring at the spot on the bed where her husband should have been.

After a few minutes, Gaspar returned with Doctor Tarrafin, who said, “Okay, so what seems to be the problem.”

“Look,” said Quipsar, motioning towards the unoccupied bed.

The doctor looked for a moment, then remarked, “Yes, it’s an empty bed. So, what’s wrong with it?”

“Well,” pointed out Quipsar, “it isn’t supposed to be empty.”

Doctor Tarrafin started to leaf through a wad of papers. “Let’s see ... 20835 ... 20835 ... Ah, here we go. ‘Room #20835 contains one Enol Vasphounden. Patient #4359 is to remain tied to his bed until other orders are given by doctor #214.’” The doctor turned his attention back to the bed. “Hmm,” he said. “That’s odd.”

“Yes,” agreed Gaspar. “I was just saying that.”

The doctor looked at the bed intently. "Very odd, indeed ... Yes ... Hmm ..." Then, after a few more moments of yes-hmm-ing, he said, "Yes, I've heard of this sort of thing, before."

"What?"

"Are you related to the patient?"

"Yes," said Quipsar. "We're married."

The doctor put a hand on her shoulder, which felt as if it had been placed there more out of procedure than comfort. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Patient #4359, but I'm afraid your husband appears to have become invisible."

"Er ... What?"

"It happens every now and then, you see," said the doctor. "Not much we can do about it, I'm afraid."

"Wait," said Gasper. "You're telling us that people turn invisible?"

"Oh, yes," said the doctor, removing his hand from the woman's shoulder. "People, places, things. It sounds strange, I know, but it does happen. It is quite a rare condition, but, every now and then, something like, say, a crucial piece of police evidence will suddenly turn invisible, and no one will ever see it, again. Or a fortuneteller's shop will be perfectly normal one day, but the next ... Poof! Invisible. Fortuneteller and all."

Gasper rolled his eyes insultingly. "I do not believe that people turn invisible."

"Well, the proof," said the doctor, motioning towards the bed, "is right there in front of you."

"I think it's much more likely that Enol simply escaped."

"Who?"

"The patient," explained Gasper.

"Oh, come now, don't be silly," said the doctor. "He was tied to the bed. Where could he go? No, no, I'm quite convinced that invisibility is the answer, here."

"I'm quite convinced," said Gasper, "that you're a loony."

To this, Doctor Tarrafin indignantly exclaimed, "Don't be absurd! I am and always have been an avid hippo supporter."

Confused, Gasper said, "I really don't see what that has to do with anything."

"Well," said the doctor, "you brought it up."

"I ... What ...? Never mind."

"I won't."

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“Look,” said Quipsar, finally getting over the shock of having a hand touch her shoulder that had probably just been slicing up umbilical cords, “isn’t it just possible that there may be some other explanation?”

“No, I’m sorry.”

“Okay. Okay,” argued Gasper, “if he’s so invisible, then why doesn’t he say something?”

Tarrafin considered the question, scratched his head, and answered, “Well, he’s probably just sleeping.”

“Sleeping?”

“Well, he is in bed, after all. Best not to wake him, though. There’s nothing like discovering that one has become invisible to put one in a foul mood.”

“Aha!” exclaimed Gasper. “If Enol turned invisible, his clothes wouldn’t turn invisible with him. Explain that!”

“Ah ... Well ...” The doctor trailed off. Then, after a long pause, he said, “They might ... Invisibility’s a very mysterious phenomenon. I doubt we’ll ever really fully understand it.”

“I doubt you’ll ...” Gasper stopped as he realized he couldn’t think of an appropriately insulting way to end that statement. He felt kind of stupid stopping in mid-sentence, though. Maybe no one would notice. Why were they all staring at him? Were they waiting for him to say something? What should he do? “Er ...” He mumbled some gibberish in the most insulting fashion he could manage. There. That should do it.

“Hmm ... Well ... Yes,” said the doctor. “Now, if you don’t have anymore questions, I do have some less invisible patients I should probably attend to. When I have a spare moment, I’ll try to see if I can locate some pamphlets on learning to live with invisibility.”

Then, he exited the room, leaving Gasper, Quipsar, and Dernkid alone with the allegedly occupied bed.

“Well,” said Quipsar, “that was stupid.”





## **Chapter 37**

### **The Final Battle and the Light at the End of the Tunnel**

There was a knock at the door. Then, there was another knock at the door. Enol remained seated in Louie and told whoever it was to “Go away!”

A muffled voice drifting in from the other side of the still anonymous door said, “Enol, it’s me ... Gasper. Let me in.”

Enol told Gasper to “Bugger off!”

“Come on, Enol. Quipsar’s here with me.”

Enol told Quipsar to “Bugger off!” too.

“Please, honey, open the door,” requested Quipsar.

“No,” said Enol firmly. He crossed his arms over his chest and proceeded to look very serious. Then, he remembered they couldn’t see him, anyway, and picked his nose.

“Is there something bothering you?” guessed Gasper.

“No. I judtht haith your thupid gudth.”

“What?”

Enol’s finger dropped to his side, and he repeated, “I just hate your stupid guts.”

“Oh, is that all?”

“Yes.”

“Ah ...” Gasper pondered the situation. “Is there anything at all I

can do to make you open the door?”

“You can,” suggested Enol, not entirely kindly, “try jumping off of Car Peak and dying and doing some other very unpleasant things to yourself.”

Gasper turned to Quipsar and theorized, “I think he’s upset.”

“Why don’t you just go away?”

“Because I want to help you win the Supreme Ruler election.”

“I’ll win it by myself,” Enol stubbornly claimed.

Gasper pointed out to him, “You can’t win without my help.”

“Yeah ... Well ... I ... Hmm ...” Enol took a moment to mull this over. Reluctant to open the door, he tried to imagine a possible scenario that might lead to his winning the election on his own. People deciding that liars weren’t so bad after all was a distant possibility. Bank robberies suddenly coming into fashion was an even more distant one. Then, there was always the slight chance that Kilo Jopset might commit ritual suicide. What Enol was entirely unable to imagine, though, was something believable. After a bit, he said, “Crud,” removed his seat from Louie’s, and opened the door. In an attempt to maintain some semblance of dignity, he said. “You know, I still don’t like you very much, though.”

“Fine,” replied Gasper, as he, Quipsar, and Dernkid entered the apartment.

“So,” said Enol, internally cursing his meager imagination, “what do you think my chances are after what happened at The Great Debate?”

Gasper answered, “Well, people don’t like bank robbers, but I think we may still have a shot at this. The first thing I want to do is unveil our newest campaign slogan, ‘Kilo Jopset is a murderer.’”



Kilo Jopset is a murderer  
Drops his victims from a girder, er  
They fall much like a dead bird, er, er  
You could be second or third, er, er  
I’m sure it will really hurt, er, er  
Kilo Jopset. What a nerd! Er, er  
Paid for by the Vasphouden for Supreme Ruler Committee



“Damn,” said Kilo Jopset, switching off his FV. “That’s catchy.” It was so catchy, in fact, that he knew most of Kanteron 6 would probably

be singing about his homicidal tendencies from now until Election Day. That was a fact that would surely prove to be very, very not good for him. Obviously, he was going to have to do something about this. He called his publicist. Soon after, they revealed their newest catchphrase, “Enol Vasphouden hates you,” to the Kanteronian public.

Enol Vasphouden did not like this catchphrase one bit. In fact, it would be more than fair to say that he hated it, much like Kilo Jopset claimed he hated the general populace. Thus, he decided to counter this with an ad which prominently declared, “Kilo Jopset is evil.”

Kilo Jopset, who wasn’t especially fond of being called evil, retaliated with, “Enol Vasphouden dislikes ‘Buds.’” This led to, “Kilo Jopset uses environmentally unsafe hair care products.” “Enol Vasphouden is cruel to animals.” “Kilo Jopset represses minorities.” “Enol Vasphouden hits children.” “Kilo Jopset rapes women.” “Enol Vasphouden rapes grob-leks.” It went on and on.

Finally, an enraged Enol came up with what he felt would be the ultimate campaign slogan. After a bit of argument with Gasper concerning whether or not they would actually be allowed to air it on FV, the catchphrase, “Kilo Jopset eats babies,” was released, much to Kilo Jopset’s dismay, Enol’s satisfaction, and the public’s horror/fascination.

Then, Election Day came. Enol voted for himself. Kilo Jopset voted for himself. The small percentage of the Kanteronian public that actually thought it all really was worth the effort cast their votes for the candidate of their choice. The votes rolled in. They were counted, added up, and the winner was announced on live FV.

Enol, Gasper, and Quipsar waited in suspense—as well as Louie, the floor, and the metal chair, respectively—while the news anchor read the results. “With three votes, is hippo nominee Kilo Jopset.”

“Ha!” exclaimed Enol. “I knew that baby thing would do the trick.”

“With four votes is cuckoo Enol Vasphouden.”

“Er ... How many votes do Supreme Rulers usually get?”

“And, with 5,698,724 votes, winning in a surprise landslide, is pony Arcandle Opem.”

“Wh ... What?”

“We asked several voters what influenced their decisions most.”

The image of the reporter dissolved and was replaced with a guy, who said, “Well, with all of the stuff Slomac and Ernol Vesphoodem were saying about each other, I didn’t want to vote for either of them, so I voted for Arcandle Opem, instead. I don’t remember hearing anybody

say anything bad about him, so I guess he's okay."

Then, an elderly lady said, "I don't vote for baby-eaters or people who don't like 'Buds.'"

"But ... But ..." insisted Enol, "this isn't how it's supposed to end ..."

"Cheer up," advised Gasper. "You can always run again, next time."

"But, I want to blow up Kanteron 7, *now* ..."

Then, the telephone rang. Quipsar picked it up. "Hello ... Yes ... Uh-huh ... Uh-huh ... Sure, yeah ... Just a minute." She turned to Enol and said, "Honey, it's for you."

Enol took the telephone receiver and said, "Hello?"

"You bloody Vaspounden bloody phenol!" It was Kilo Jopset.

"Oh ... Er ... Hi ..."

"Thanks a lot, you loony cuckoo! You've ruined everything! Now, because of you, I don't get to blow up Kanteron 7!"

Enol said, "Wh-What?" but there was no answer, for Kilo Jopset had already hung up.

"Who was that?" asked Gasper.

"It was Kilo Jopset. Apparently, he was planning to blow up Kanteron 7, too."

"Oh," said Gasper. "I thought he might."

"You did? But ... Wait ... Then, why didn't ... Never mind ... And don't say, 'I won't.'"

"I won't."

"Good ... Wait ..."

"Well," said Quipsar, asking the question already in the minds of most readers, "what now?"

Before anyone could satisfy her curiosity—or yours, either, for that matter—the telephone rang, again. Enol grabbed it and yelled into the receiver, "Listen, you bloody, Slomac-playing phenol, if you don't stop calling me, I'm going to ..."

"Er ... Excuse me?" The voice was female.

"Oh, I'm sorry," apologized Enol. "I thought you were someone else ... Wait ... You wouldn't happen to know Kilo Jopset, would you?"

"Well ... No ..."

"Good. He's a phenol."

"Well," said the voice, "I really wouldn't know about that ..."

"Wait a minute," said Enol. "Who are you?"

"I," answered the voice, "am Ms. Frinklebarry, and I fear you must

be the father of one Dernkid Vasphouden.”

“Yep,” said Enol. “That would be me.”

“Ah, yes,” said Ms. Frinklebarry. “Unfortunately, I’m afraid I’m going to have to talk to you.”



The classroom looked like a classroom. That is, it had a blackboard and lots of little desks sitting in neat, little, orderly rows. Lining the walls were bright, colorful pictures of anthropomorphic animals learning to share and respect authority—basically pictures of the sorts of things adults are generally led to believe that children are supposed to like. In reality, of course, the children in question would usually much rather see pictures of hardened movie cops bringing their suspects to justice without the formality of judges, juries, and public opinions based on the slanted media coverage.

The only two people in the room, Enol and Ms. Frinklebarry, were currently engaged in a discussion, the results of which would likely have an enormous impact on the life of Enol’s son, who was therefore not involved in any way whatsoever.

“You see, Mr. Vasphouden,” explained the school teacher, “the problem is with Dernkid’s homework.”

“Uh-huh,” said Enol, who almost certainly did not, in fact, see anything except a vaguely creepy picture of a purple groblek playing a friendly game of faseball with a bright orange crogter.

“For several months, Dernkid did not turn in a single homework assignment. Because of this, I’ve been giving him detention every single day, which I’m sure you’ve noticed.”

“Er ... Yeah,” said Enol. “I think I might remember something like that.”

“Then, today, he finally handed in this,” said Ms. Frinklebarry, holding up a five-hundred-page block of paper with the words, “*Addition, Subtraction, and Interdimensional Science* - by Dernkid,” scrawled on the front page in a young child’s unsteady handwriting.

“Wow, if you gave him that much homework, it’s no wonder he turned it in late. I mean, I’ve heard that kids today have more homework than they used to, but good gravy!”

“No, you don’t understand,” explained Ms. Frinklebarry slowly so that Enol wouldn’t be left behind. “All I asked him to do was some simple addition and subtraction, but, instead, he gave me this, which is

filled with bizarre formulas and calculations that even I, a professional teacher, can't possibly begin to understand. I think, Mr. Vaspounden, that your child appears to be ... well ... special."

"Oh. Groovy."

"No," corrected the teacher. "I mean he's stupid."

"Oh ... Darn."

"The bizarre gibberish he's filled these pages with is obviously some kind of attempt to cover up the fact that he doesn't understand the material. I'm afraid I'm going to have to suggest that your child take remedial classes."

"Does that," asked Enol, trying his best not to seem uncaring about his child's future, "require extra money to be paid by me?"

"No."

"Okay. Fine, then. Go ahead. Put him in the stupid classes. I don't care."

"You've made a wise decision, Mr. Vaspounden." Then, as Enol turned to leave, she added, "Would you like to keep the homework?"

"Sure, okay, why not?" answered Enol, trying to avoid eye contact with a group of banjo-playing vools. "Maybe I can use it to hit Kilo Jopset in the head."

"What?"

"Never mind."

"I ..."

"Don't," said Enol. "Just don't."



While the rest of the apartment slept, Enol read. He was amazed. He was astounded. He was a little confused, admittedly, but that was to be expected. Interdimensional science was not the kind of thing they'd taught him about in school. He'd mostly learned about getting made fun of by the kids that were more popular than him and making fun of the less popular kids to make himself feel better. Thus, Dernkid's theories were rather a bit beyond his own meager comprehension. But he wondered ... could it be real? Was it actually possible for a person to travel through the fifth dimension? If it was all true, then maybe ... just maybe ... it might be worth a shot.

Enol quietly went into the kitchen and gently woke his son. "Dernkid," he said, "tell me about the fifth dimension."

Dernkid proceeded to do so. Enol listened with great interest and

not-so-great understanding. He asked questions, which Dernkid was unable to answer. Eventually, he realized that this was because he was asking the wrong questions. Questions about interdimensional science asked by people who know nothing of interdimensional science rarely made any real kind of sense. Therefore, Enol had to just sit and listen as Dernkid tried explaining the same concepts in smaller words. Miraculously, Enol found that he understood most of these smaller words. Unsurprising, though, was his inability to comprehend how they fit together or why Dernkid chose to place them in that particular order.

Finally, he just asked, “Dernkid, can you really travel through the fifth dimension?”

Dernkid nodded.

“How?”

Dernkid explained, “You just have to know it exists and you’ve always been able to go through it.”

“Uh-huh,” said Enol, “and how do I know that?”

Dernkid proceeded to describe a series of experiments which proved this but made Enol’s head hurt.

To counter this physical discomfort, Enol asked, “Would it be possible for you to take me through the fifth dimension with you?”

Dernkid nodded.

“Dernkid, I need to call someone, first, but how would you like to have a little experiment, tonight?”





## **Chapter 38**

### **An Unlikely Team**

“Okay,” said Kilo Jopset, grumpily taking a sip of his frompe. “Why am I here?”

“Well, I don’t know,” answered Enol, partly because this was just the way he was used to answering questions. For completeness, he added, “I mean, why are any of us here? What’s the meaning of it all? Why are ...”

“If you’re going to be an idiot,” interrupted Kilo Jopset, “I’d appreciate it if you’d at least do it with a little bit of originality.”

“What?”

“Never mind. Just tell me why I’m here, right now, with you.”

Here, in this case, was inside one of the numerous frompe shops that covered the planet. It was rather late, quite a bit past the frompe shop’s normal closing time, which might lead many to believe that getting inside would be rather difficult. As luck would have it, however, this was an area that Enol had a bit of experience in. And it only took him three throws.

“I thought a good way for us to make up and settle our differences would be over a nice, hot cup of frompe.”

This sounded reasonable enough to Kilo Jopset, aside from one fairly major detail. “What makes you think I’d want to settle anything with you?”

"A good question," answered Enol, "seeing as how we've done nothing but insult each other over the past several months."

"Yes, I know all about that. I was there, if you'll remember."

"Ah, yes, of course," said Enol. "The point, though—and, believe it or not, I do have one—is that it has recently come to my attention that the two of us share a common goal."

Kilo Jopset nodded in agreement. "Yes, of course, we both want to be Supreme Ruler, but you've managed to screw that up for the both of us."

Enol shook his head and said, "No, no. This is something different."

"Of course it is, and I'd appreciate it if you'd hurry up and tell me what the hell it is."

"Geez," said Enol, "you have no appreciation for the building of tension. It's no wonder they canceled 'Slomac.'"

Kilo Jopset sat his mug down hard enough to slosh frompe onto the table and informed Enol, "They did not *cancel* 'Slomac.' I thought it would be a good time to end the series."

"Yes, of course," agreed Enol. "After that last season, so did the FV studio."

"Okay, that's it. If you don't tell me why you called me here, I'm just going to stand up and walk away."

"You said you wanted to blow up Kanteron 7."

"Yes," said Kilo Jopset. "I did ... and I would have gotten away with it, too, if not for you meddling loonies."

"You mean cuckoos," corrected Enol.

"No, I mean loonies. Stupid, bloody loonies."

"Well, that doesn't matter. The point is I want to blow up Kanteron 7, too."

Kilo Jopset said, "Well, now, don't you feel like an idiot for running against me?"

"Look, there's no need for insults, here."

"Maybe not," replied Kilo Jopset, "but I hate you, and your FV show sucks."

"That doesn't matter, either. I think I know a way we can do it."

"Is this," asked Kilo Jopset cautiously, "some kind of a sex thing?"

"What? No. I know how we can blow up Kanteron 7."

"I'm listening."

Enol explained, "What we need is a twenty-ton meganucleatomic-deplanetizer. All we have to do is break into a heavily-guarded military

warehouse and steal one.”

“Let me get this straight,” replied Kilo Jopset. “You want to break into a massive, government-owned facility filled not only with countless weapons but also with an uncomfortably high number of soldiers who will use them to shoot you on sight?”

“Yes,” said Enol. “There’s one right down the street.”

“Fine,” said Kilo Jopset. “Go ahead. Be my guest. Please. I, on the other hand, am leaving.”

“I have a plan.”

“You have twenty seconds.”

“Meet my secret weapon,” said Enol, motioning to his left. “Kilo Jopset, this is Dernkid.”

“Right,” said Kilo Jopset, standing up, “it’s not been a pleasure knowing you, and I hope to never see you, again.”

“Dernkid, tell him about the fifth dimension.”

Dernkid told him. Kilo Jopset listened reluctantly. Then, he listened with mild interest. Finally, he was listening with great enthusiasm. It sounded crazy, but ... if this kid was really able to do what he said he was able to do ... it could just work.

After a long, thoughtful pause, he said, “Okay, I’m in. I have one question, though. Why bother to call me? Why not just do it all, yourself?”

Enol said, “Well, there are a couple of reasons for that. First of all, I thought it would be a good idea to settle our differences. I don’t want to go through life with an enemy who has a history of murdering people.”

“I’ll pretend I didn’t hear that.”

“More importantly, though, I needed ... Well ... I needed someone to help me ... aim the weapon.”

“What?”

“My aim,” said Enol. “It’s ... not very good ...”

“Wait a minute ... you called me here because you want me to aim for you?”

“Well ... Yes. That and the murdering.”

Kilo Jopset started laughing.

“I’d appreciate it,” said Enol, “if you wouldn’t do that.”

Kilo Jopset continued to laugh.

“You know, this is making me feel a little self-conscious.”

Kilo Jopset failed to cease laughing.

“Please, stop ...”



"You know I want to blow up Kanteron 7 every bit as much as you do, but are you entirely certain that it's absolutely necessary for me to put this sock on my head?"

Enol nodded. "Yeah. Trust me. I've done this, before."

"Yes," said Kilo Jopset, "but does it really have to be used?"

"Well, where do you think we're going to find an open sock store at this time of night?"

Kilo Jopset sighed resignedly. He lifted up the black sock and reluctantly pulled it over his head. Enol and Dernkid did the same.

After a moment, Kilo Jopset said, "Wait ... why couldn't we just break into a sock store?"

"Er ... Well ... Hmm ... We've already got the socks on our heads, now, so I don't suppose it'd do much good, at this point."

"I hate you."

"Er ... I'm sorry ..."

"Never mind. Forget it."

"Sure ... Okay," said Enol. "After all, what are friends for?"

"I'm not your friend," insisted Kilo Jopset. "This is more like a business partnership."

"Admit it. Sometimes, you think I'm okay."

"Sometimes," said Kilo Jopset, "I think you're an asshole."

Enol said, "Hey, watch the language. My kid's here."

"What? Your kid? You mean The Great Phenolator? The election's over, Vasphouden. You don't have to pretend to care, anymore."

Enol said, "Maybe, but, you know ... I'm kind of going to miss being a politician."

"Not me," said Kilo Jopset. "I'm looking forward to going back to my normal life as an insanely rich former FV star with so much money the only work he has to do is the occasional interview."

"Yeah," agreed Enol. "Sounds pretty neat."

"More important, at this moment in time, however," pointed out Kilo Jopset, "is this wall." The wall in question surrounded one of Kanteron 6's largest, most heavily-guarded military warehouses. It was eighty feet high, made of nine-foot thick stone, and coated with an unhealthy dose of electric wire.

"Yeah," said Enol. "This is a pretty big wall."

"So I'd noticed," agreed Kilo Jopset.

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Enol turned to Dernkid and said, "Alright, son, are you sure you can get us inside?"

Dernkid nodded and explained, as best he could, that it was really all just a matter of stepping through the fifth dimension, to a parallel portion of the dimensional continuum in which the wall didn't exist, then reentering their own dimension inside the warehouse, thereby avoiding all obstacles.

Enol nodded. "Uh-huh. However it works, just do it."

Dernkid took them both by the hand and said, "Follow me." After a moment, he led them through the fifth dimension, around space, around time, and, more importantly, around the wall.

"Whoa," said Kilo Jopset. "That was kind of weird."

Dernkid had brought them out in a room right in the center of the warehouse. On their left was a large vehicle with a massive cannon and the words, "MEGANUCLEATOMIC-DEPLANETIZER - DON'T TOUCH," stenciled onto the side in large, white letters.

"There it is," said Enol.

"It's so beautiful," observed Kilo Jopset.

"Okay, since there's only one of us here who can travel through the fifth dimension at will, I think we're going to have to let Dernkid drive."

"Fine," said Kilo Jopset, as he climbed into the back seat. "Just make sure that he does so carefully."

Enol sat down in the passenger seat and said, "Alright, Dernkid, just take her slow."

Dernkid climbed behind the wheel, and Enol said, "See if you can bring us out in a field or something ... Preferably one that's facing Kanteron 7."

Dernkid pressed the button marked "GO," and the machine started up loudly. Summoned by the noise, a group of soldiers ran into the room just in time to see the meganucleatomic-deplanetizer disappear into a dimension beyond their comprehension.

Dernkid was rather unsteady behind the wheel, but, luckily, it was late, so there weren't any other cars on the road.

"Okay, you're doing well, Dernkid," said Enol, attempting to instruct his son in safe driving practices. "Keep her steady. Stay to the right, or ... I don't know ... Maybe they drive on the other side of the road in the fifth dimension. Well, let's compromise ... Drive in the middle."

The vehicle slowly made its way down the dark street, by The Fifth Dimension Frompe Shop, in front of The 5-D Cleaners, and past a

fortuneteller's shop with the window broken out. Finally, Dernkid steered the machine back into their own plane of existence, emerging in the center of a large, empty field.

Enol turned to face Kilo Jopset. "Okay, now, it's your turn to do your part to make the planet a better place."

"With pleasure," said Kilo Jopset, as he manned the controls of the cannon. He pulled a lever, aligned the targeting reticule, adjusted the angular momentum, and something the something else. When he was completely satisfied, he reached out, extended his finger, and pressed the large, red button marked "SHOOT."

## **Epilogue**

### **The Freight Train**

The explosion lit up the night sky. The shock waves shook the ground. Lovers held each other in fear. Those with religious beliefs prayed for safety. Those with families yelled at their kids to quit making so much darned racket, now, or else.

There was panic. There was disorder. Then, everyone realized that it was just somebody else's planet that got blown up, and they started to relax a bit. When large chunks of the exploded planet started raining down on Kanteron 6, the people started to panic, again. When it stopped, and the experts said that it was all over, they relaxed some more. When the experts were wrong, and pieces of space-rock started falling again, the people resumed their panicking. Then, the rain of debris stopped, and the experts told them that it was safe to come outside, again. The people continued panicking. The experts said that no, really, everything was okay, now, and they definitely weren't wrong this time, honest. The people still panicked. After a while, though, they decided that it did, indeed, look as if no more bits of Kanteron 7 were going to strike them in the head anytime soon, and things finally began to calm down.

Then, something happened. With Kanteron 7 gone and no more deadly debris traveling menacingly through the atmosphere overhead,

people started to feel better about their own planet. Suddenly, it seemed that things on Kanteron 6 weren't so bad, after all. As a matter of fact, they were pretty darn good. People were even glad they'd decided to stay right here on Kanteron 6 instead of buying that nice house on Kanteron 7 they'd thought about getting a couple of years ago. Life was pleasant. Everyone had fun. People began to take advantage of Kanteron 6's relatively affordable prices. They went to the beach to bask in the glory of its nature. They picnicked in the park to get the most out of their nice, warm days. Then, someone pointed out that it seemed awfully warm for winter, didn't it?

It turned out that shock waves from the destruction of Kanteron 7 had shifted the planet's orbit. Kanteron 6 was currently drifting ever closer to the sun. Scientists estimated that the planet's orbit would stabilize in just over six months. At that time, it would be a full 1,687,428 miles closer to the sun, leaving the planet of Kanteron 6 little more than a vast desert.



"Nice going, Enol."

"Hey, don't blame me," insisted Enol. "Kilo Jopset pulled the trigger."

"Yeah," said Gasper. "Go ahead. Blame it all on Kilo Jopset."

"Well, that's kind of what I was doing," said Enol.

"So I'd noticed," replied Gasper. Then, he added, "Crud, I hate to think what this extra heat is going to do to my glazer sales."

Quipsar interjected, "You think you've got problems? Just imagine what that desert environment is going to do to my hair."

"Well," said Enol, "maybe we could try to correct the planet's orbit by blowing up Kanteron 5."

"Please!" said Gasper. "Haven't you improved the planet enough as it is?"

"It was just a thought ... You're probably right, though. Still ..."

At that moment, Enol was interrupted by a knock at the door. He opened it, revealing Kilo Jopset. "Oh, hi."

"Hello, Vasphouden."

"So," said Enol, "what brings you here?"

"The Kilo-Jopsetmobile," said Kilo Jopset. "I'm surprised you didn't hear. But that's not important. I came to say goodbye."

"Oh?"



“Yes. I’m leaving.”

“You came all the way here just to tell me you’re leaving?” asked Enol. “Couldn’t you have saved yourself a trip and just called to say you weren’t here?”

Kilo Jopset sighed in annoyance. “No, I mean I’m leaving the planet.”

“Oh. Where will you go?”

“I haven’t decided, yet,” said Kilo Jopset. “I was thinking that Qes-ular 9 is pretty nice this time of year.”

“Well, yes ...”

“But I thought maybe I’d go somewhere that I could remain anonymous. Being famous can get annoying.”

“So I’ve discovered, but that’s going to be pretty hard,” pointed out Enol. “Everyone knows ‘Slomac.’”

“Not everyone,” corrected Kilo Jopset. “I’ve been doing some research on this small, blue-green planet out in the middle of nowhere. They haven’t even made interstellar contact, yet, so I could go undercover.”

“Ooh ... Undercover ... Like in that one episode where you infiltrated the gang of thieves.”

“Well ... Yes,” agreed Kilo Jopset. “Something a bit like that, I suppose ...”

“Sounds groovy.”

“I’ve even chosen a name for myself, already.”

“Oh?”

“Yes,” said Kilo Jopset. “Model Tee. I think that will be nicely inconspicuous.”

Enol agreed that it probably would be, wished him luck, and said his goodbyes. When he returned to his seat, Gasper said, “You know, it’s probably a good thing you didn’t get elected, after all.”

“Gee, thanks,” said Enol. “I’m glad you have such faith in my leadership abilities.”

“No,” said Gasper, “I just mean that, what with all of this desert planet stuff, Arcandle Opem’s really going to have his work cut out for him.”

“Hey, yeah! Being Supreme Ruler right now would suck!”

“And,” added Gasper, “if I were Assistant Ruler, right now, I wouldn’t have the time to take advantage of the scholarship I’ve just been offered to The Kanteron 6 University of Modern Art.”

"True."

"So, you see," said Gasper, "life isn't all that bad."

"No?" asked Quipsar. "I assume you mean apart from the whole planet becoming a wasteland thing."

"Well, yeah," said Gasper, "but it could be worse."

"Could it?"

"Sure. We could be on Blotskapar 29."

"Well ... I suppose ..."

"Or we could be from Kanteron 7," added Gasper. "They don't even *have* a planet, anymore. Besides, who knows? Living on a desert planet might even be fun."

"You know," said Enol, "I guess you're right. I'm glad I live on Kanteron 6."

"That's the spirit."

"What the hell, you know? I've always wanted more sandcastles in my life."

"Come to think of it," added Quipsar, "I've always had this thing for cacti."

"Yeah," said Enol, "and I never really cared that much for water, anyway."

And the three of them sat there, drinking their frompes. They talked about the heat. They talked about the quicksand. They talked about the deadly sandworms. And, in spite of it all, they felt pretty good. Happiness, they thought, didn't come from the weather. It didn't come from the greenness of your grass. You couldn't get it from a piece of clothing. It didn't matter how much money you made. It made no difference how much power you held or how many civilizations quivered in shock and/or awe at the might of your military. It didn't matter whether you were a boy or a girl. Young or old. Fat or thin. It wasn't about cars. It wasn't about hairstyles. It wasn't about mansions. Happiness, they now knew, came from none of these things. Happiness, they thought to themselves, was a nice, warm cup of frompe.

So, to break a cardinal rule and write around the almighty fourth wall, don't let things get to you. Work got you down? Money problems? Neighbors got nicer lawn ornaments? Sit back, relax, and drink up. Life is too short to waste trying to live up to some artificial standard which always happens to be just out of your reach. It won't stop and wait for you to enjoy it. And it's too important to bother worrying that some crabby critic will dislike the act of violating a long-held law of storytelling.

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Envy is pointless.  
Fighting is futile.  
Live your life.  
Be good to one another.  
Enjoy.

The End

-J. N. White



## Glossary

### Just Like in a REAL Book!

**alkdoe** – (*n.*) A rare Kanteronian animal hunted to extinction for its apparently fashionable kidneys.

**arble** – (*n.*) A ... thing ... of some kind. Stilks have them, apparently.

**Arcandle Opem** – (*n.*) A politician and competitor for the ponies' Supreme Ruler nomination.

**Ardel Voodavog** – (*n.*) Inventor of the Voodavog-Sunny-Day-Maker.

**bambel** – (*n.*) Some kind of animal whose head makes a pretty good helmet.

**Blotskapar 29** – (*n.*) A planet that happens to be a really lousy place to live.

**“Buds”** – 1. (*n.*) A word dorks use to refer to their friends. 2. (*n.*) A mega-popular Kanteronian FV show about a group of buds (see definition 1) who sit around a frompe shop in the middle of the day while most people are at work and make surprisingly inoffensive jokes about sex.

**Car Peak** – (*n.*) Kanteron 6's third largest mountain, formed after an accident involving a flying car.

**crogter** – (*n.*) A Kanteronian animal of some sort and mascot for the Kanteron 6 faseball team. Also, people eat them.

**crud** – 1. (*interj.*) A mild swear popular amongst Kanteronians. 2. (*adj.*) Also used in reference to a subsection of Kanteronian political groups, i.e. all of the ones that aren't called ponies or hippos.

**cuckoos** – 1. (*n.*) A Kanteronian political group founded on the principle that children ought not to be exposed to dirty words on FV. 2. (*n.*) A peculiar Earth bird with the annoying habit of laying its eggs in the nests of other birds, leaving the unsuspecting parents-to-be the task of raising its children. 3. (*n.*) A word used to describe total loonies. 4. (*n.*) A nice, family-friendly, non-aviary-sounding name.

**“Daddy Knows What to Do”** – (*n.*) A Kanteronian FV show about a perfect man who knew everything.

**Demboyso** – (*n.*) A popular Kanteronian musical act composed of the members Jay, Ray, Clay, Trey, and Rupert.

**Embadel Linkwald** – (*n.*) A Kanteronian teenager who, unlike so many other teenagers, actually *does* know everything.

**faseball** – (*n.*) A faseball is like a baseball, but calling it a faseball makes it seem somehow alien and thus helps to improve

the sci-fi atmosphere of the story.

**flazer** – (*n.*) A Kanteronian coat that has, for some reason, three arms.

**flompdir** – (*n.*) A ... thing of some sort ... A thing that can be crushed.

**Franvy Yensin** – (*n.*) The reporter from that one chapter ... You remember ... The one with the car.

**frompe** – (*n.*) A wildly popular Kanteronian beverage which is usually drunk in the morning, just after one has awakened. It is served hot, has a foul odor, and tastes terrible. No one is quite sure why it is so popular, but they drink it, anyway.

**funavision** – (*n.*) A Kanteronian device that is similar to an Earth television but more advanced in vague, unexplainable ways.

**funner** – (*adj.*) Totally not a real word.

**FV** – (*n.*) Abbreviation for funavision (see funavision).

**Garvindew 2** – (*n.*) Eh, it's some planet or other. They have a faseball team.

**glazer** – (*n.*) Gasper Nandelhuck's proposed improvement on the flazer. The difference is that the glazer would have four arms instead of the more typical three.

**Great Shortage of '63, The** – (*n.*) One of the darkest periods in Kanteronian history, when the planet was unexpectedly left completely devoid of toilet tissue. During this time, 79% of the planet's literature was lost forever.

**groblek** – (*n.*) A groblek is a Kanteronian animal that is strange and weird and ... Okay, it's just a dog ... A plain, old, stupid dog just like we have on Earth. So, see how calling it a groblek makes it more interesting?

**Heimlich maneuver, the** – (*n.*) A Kanteronian life-saving technique named after Kanteronian scientist Alexander Graham Heimlich.

**hilonia** – (*n.*) A bizarre Kanteronian meat product. What makes it bizarre is the fact that it is composed entirely of animal

parts that no one wishes to eat. Somehow, though, when ground up and mixed together in hilonia, the resulting substance becomes mysteriously edible.

**Himber Lagcroft** – (*n.*) The host of a popular Kanteronian late night talk show. He gave Enol his first FV interview and seemed not to like him very much.

**hippos** – (*n.*) A Kanteronian political group. The hippos believe that people's freedom should be limited, even though they object to passing laws which do so.

**Kanteron 6** – (*n.*) Kanteron 7's closest neighbor and, quite possibly, the second greatest planet in the known universe to live on. Unfortunately, the constant trailing behind Kanteron 7 in this matter has given the residents of Kanteron 6 something of an inferiority complex. This is the planet all of the action in the story takes place on, so all of this is very important and you should take great strides to remember it and not have to be looking it up all the time.

**Kanteron 6 Center for Government, Law, and Telling People What to Do, The** – (*n.*) The very center of Kanteronian government, duh. It's the planetary equivalent of a county courthouse or state capitol building.

**Kanteron 6 Center for Law Enforcement and Oppression, The** – (*n.*) The ... uh ... Police Department.

**Kanteron 6 Center for Shopping and Goods Acquisition, The** – (*n.*) An important center of Kanteronian commerce and ... Okay, it's a mall.

**Kanteron 6 Society for Deciding which Words Are Bad, The** – (*n.*) A Kanteronian society that ... Well, they decide which words are bad ... Pretty self-explanatory really.

**Kanteron 7** – (*n.*) The greatest planet in the known universe, voted best planet in the galaxy to live on for five hundred and thirty-seven years in a row.

**Kanteronian** – 1. (*adj.*) Of or having to

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do with Kanteron. 2. (*n.*) The natural inhabitants of Kanteron 6 and only native species widely considered to be intelligent.

**Kilo Jopset** – (*n.*) A well-known Kanteronian actor and star of the gritty police drama, “Slomac.”

**klapdong** – (*n.*) A condiment frequently used to improve the taste of Kanteronian sandwiches. This improvement is very much necessary, as hilonia tastes terrible.

**Lakki** – 1. (*n.*) An old Kanteronian FV show about a family’s loyal groblek who constantly has to save Little Mibby from the old, abandoned wells and mines he inexplicably keeps falling into. One of these days that family’s gonna wise up and finally fill in that damn well once and for all. 2. (*n.*) The groblek in said show.

**Lesvun Foral** – (*n.*) Founder of The Kanteron 6 Society for Deciding which Words Are Bad. He didn’t like bad words.

**Louie Splazeunver** – (*n.*) Chairman of The Kanteron 6 Governmental Department of Love.

**lusser** – (*n.*) An animal of some type and mascot for the Garvindow 2 faseball team.

**Mosley Ertin** – (*n.*) The janitor from The Kanteron 6 Center for Government, Law, and Telling People What to Do. He became quite upset after Enol inadvertently spilled garbage on the floor.

**Ms. Frinklebarry** – (*n.*) Dernkid’s teacher. Her lesson plans emphasize the important principles of following instructions and thinking “inside the box.”

**okkodaccalite** – (*lie.*) There is no okkodaccalite in the story. You’re just flipping through the glossary looking for spoilers, aren’t you? Why, you dirty, little ...

**Ospar Empduc** – (*n.*) The slowest Kanteronian frompe brewer ever, who stubbornly insisted that frompe should always be brewed at room temperature.

**“Pelican Island”** – (*n.*) An old Kanteronian FV show about a bunch of people on an island who can make a satellite out

of a tree but can’t fix a leaky boat.

**phenol** – (*n.*) Kanteronian slang for “really bad thing you don’t want your name to rhyme with.” It is considered by most people to be pretty much the most offensive word in the entire language.

**Pimwy Dolger** – (*n.*) A well-respected Kanteronian sculptor.

**Police Officer Henrik** – (*n.*) A policeman assigned to investigate the robbery of a hardware store. He seems to know a lot about modern art.

**ponies** – 1. (*n.*) A Kanteronian political group. The ponies believe that people should be free and that they must, meanwhile, pass laws which limit freedom. 2. (*n.*) A Kanteronian animal that looks like a pony, acts like a pony, and sounds like a pony, but is, in fact, not a pony.

**Quesular 9** – (*n.*) A planet. It apparently has a capital of some sort.

**rengul** – (*n.*) A species of large, succulent creatures often seen hanging around outside of abattoirs and fast food restaurants.

**Romby Fansjen** – (*n.*) A Kanteronian scriptwriter who works for the Vaspounnden campaign.

**Slomac** – (*n.*) A classic Kanteronian police drama.

**stilk** – (*n.*) An animal of some sort. Gloves are sometimes manufactured from their hollowed-out paws.

**telephone** – (*n.*) A Kanteronian communications device named after its Kanteronian inventor, Alexander Graham Telephone.

**twenty-ton meganucleatomic-deplane-tizer** – (*n.*) A very big weapon capable of destroying an entire planet.

**Ulvor Lelo** – (*n.*) An apathetic teenager working in a Kanteronian grocery store. She gets her proverbial kicks from stacking the heavy groceries on top of the easily crushed ones.

**Veequar Laddino** – (*n.*) One of Kanteron 6’s most talented film directors and a notorious jaywalker.

**Voodavog-Sunny-Day-Maker** – (*n.*) An ill-conceived invention designed to prevent the formation of rain clouds. What its inventor, Ardel Voodavog, foolishly failed to realize is that people need water to live.

**wool** – (*n.*) A Kanteronian animal whose fur has been known to be used in the pro-

duction of various undergarments.

**Wagens** – (*n.*) An older and very influential Kanteronian musical group. Their music has been repeatedly “sampled” by the much more recent music sensation, Demboyso. Most Demboyso fans, however, are much too young to actually realize this.



